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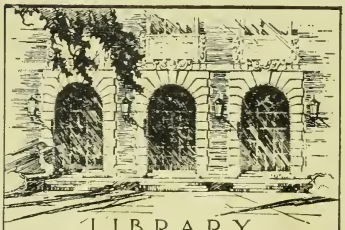

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A WOMAN'S VENGEANCE.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"CECIL'S TRYST," "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD,"

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.
1872.

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A WOMAN'S VENGEANCE.

CHAPTER I.

A GOOD NIGHT'S WORK.

ARTHUR TYNDALL did not now sit up, after his game of cards was over, to smoke a pipe with his old friend; nor had he done so since that occasion when Adair had spoken to him of Jenny. On this night, in particular, he had in fact hurried away so soon as Jones and Allardyce had departed, as though positively afraid of finding himself face to face with Jack alone; so that worthy smoked on by himself, with his eyes

half-shut, as his custom was when thinking, and with a book in his hand that he did not read. "Things are getting worse and worse," muttered he to himself. "Poor Arthur is not like the same man. He must owe these charming friends of his a little fortune—and, unhappily, not his own fortune. He is embittered and half-mad with what he persists in calling his 'Luck.' He has made up his mind to take some decided course, I feel assured—a desperate one, it must needs be—Heaven grant it may not be a fatal one! If I could only make the scales fall from his eyes, and show him what these fellows are, there would be some chance for him yet; but they are as cunning as they are ruthless—fox and wolf in one. I'll have one more try," continued he presently, "at those devil's books. As yet, I've essayed to read them only by daylight —those thieves have kept it up so late— and I'm beginning to think that, like the devil himself, they belong to the night only, or at least have then more power for evil.

Else why did not these scoundrels play with them in the daytime? If Allardyce cared for the opinion of the women, Jones certainly would not have done so, since he knows they hate him already, yet they both excused themselves from taking a hand. It must be as pleasant to rob a man of a thousand pounds before dinner-time as after. Why didn't they do it? Come, speckle-backs, be kind and tell me."

He drew his chair to the table, and dealt out the cards very slowly, face downwards as before. At first he could discover nothing peculiar. They were glazed cards, with white spots upon them, as they had always seemed to be; that was all. But presently, happening to raise his hand in dealing, the glaze on one card seemed to concentrate itself on a particular spot; the next shewed no such sign; nor the next; but the fourth card had also, like the first, a shining spot, though not in the same situation. They were both court-cards—which was in itself a strong element of suspicion—the one a

king, the other a knave. Upon selecting the court-cards, including the aces, from the rest, he found that they all showed similar spots, though in different places, whereas the plain cards had none. The spots were not only invisible by daylight, but had to be held at an unusually acute angle to be seen by candle-light; but when you once knew of their existence, recognition was easy enough. In a few deals, Adair was able to say: "This is a court-card, and this a plain one," as they passed swiftly through his fingers; and by the end of half an hour he could name each particular card. The system upon which the cards were marked was ingenious, yet very simple. Each court-card was divided into eight imaginary divisions—four at top and four at bottom—so that, whether the card was upside down or not, it could be read with equal ease. The first compartment, counting from either end, was devoted to diamonds, the second to spades, the third to hearts, the fourth to clubs; and the value of the card, whether

ace, king, queen, or knave, was indicated by its position in the compartments. A dealer at loo, who was in possession of this secret, could, therefore, always tell in which hand was the best trump, and whether it was advisable for him to play or not; and, with that advantage, it was, of course, absolutely impossible that he could fail to win. When the cards were flat on their faces, or held in the hand, no spot was to be made out, even by the microscope, in any way differing from the other spots.

"Now, this is what good Mrs. Somers would call 'very ingenuous,'" observed Adair dryly. "I wonder whether Arthur will believe me, when I show him this, or shall I have to get his money back by the same trick, in order to convince him? I suspect I shall. We'll have a new pack of cards to-morrow night, and I'll take a hand myself; then when I deal, I shall say: 'Now, mark, Tyndall, I'm giving you the knave of diamonds, and Allardyce the king of clubs, and Jones the queen of hearts.'

It's a trick that these gentlemen and I can do with any of these packs. Then if there be a rough and tumble, I should not wonder. Jones will jump out of the window, and be staked by a standard rose-tree; and Allardyce will draw a revolver, or other 'sedative' —he's just the sort of fellow to do that when all is up—and go in for me. If he kills me, it will be bad for him; but if he misses me, it will be worse.—There's a man's step in the passage, and it's not Arthur's. Can there be any other devilry afoot?" Jack threw down the cards, and rose from his seat, just as the door noiselessly opened, and admitted Mr. Paul Jones.

"He has come to burn the old cards," thought Jack. "He doesn't know that I have a specimen pack under lock and key, in my own room, poor dear."

But Mr. Jones did not seem at all disconcerted at finding his enemy in the smoking-room; on the contrary, his face evidenced much satisfaction, and there was a genuine self-congratulation in his tone, as

he exclaimed: "Thank Heaven, you are still here, Mr. Adair; you are the very man I wished to see!"

"I am still on view, though for a few minutes only," replied Jack dryly. "If I am kept up past midnight" (and he took out his watch and consulted it gravely), "there will be an extra charge."

"I won't keep you up, Mr. Adair—I won't detain you five minutes; but something has happened which may have the most fatal results, and it is you only who can avert them."

"Well, though I smoke a good deal, I'm not a patent flame-extinguisher, so it can't be Fire that's the matter," observed Jack coolly; "and if it's Thieves, you must call Tyndall, since I'm only a lodger."

"What I have to speak about is no joke," continued Mr. Paul Jones in solemn tones, and drawing a chair close to the other, who had sat down again; "it's worse than fire, and worse than thieves. The life of a guest under this roof is threatened, sir; an

innocent man is like to be murdered in cold blood!"

"Then it certainly isn't *you*," said Jack, with an involuntary glance towards the cards.

"Yes it is; it's me. Your friend's friend, an acquaintance of your own, with whom you have no cause of quarrel; a fellow-creature, at lowest, whom you are bound to protect from an assassin."

Mr. Jones spoke with an impassioned eagerness, and, when he ended, laid his hand upon the other's knee in cringing entreaty.

Jack briskly withdrew his leg, and brushed his knee-cap, as though those supplicatory fingers had been a spider with viscous legs.

"Who wants to assassinate *you?*" inquired Jack. ("He's insulted Giles," thought Jack, "and the old fellow has threatened to turn the liquid-manure engine upon him; and quite right too.")

"Mr. Magus."

"Indeed! that's serious," said Adair,

and his tone was serious too. "I don't know the facts of the case, of course; but whatever Mr. Magus has promised to do—you may be sure of one thing—he'll keep his word."

"Oh, don't say that, Mr. Adair; *pray*, don't say that. If you only knew what it was that he has threatened—there are his own words in black and white"—and Mr. Jones produced the letter, with whose contents we have just been made acquainted, and placed it in the other's hand.

"Upon my word," said Adair, when he had perused it, "this is a very ugly-looking business."

"Ugly-looking! It's simply horrible, Mr. Adair! Did you ever read such a bloodthirsty production? It might have been written in letters of gore!"

"He seems to have made up his mind, however, don't he?" said Jack coolly. "If you 'won't go out'—and you *won't*, of course—I'll bet a crown he shoots you like a rabbit."

"But that will be murder!" ejaculated Mr. Paul Jones.

"From your point of view, undoubtedly it will, but not from his. Magus is a fine old Irish gentleman of the olden time; a sort of chivalrous savage. He may shoot you on the Queen's highway, or at noonday in the Regent Circus; but he is quite incapable—if that is any satisfaction to you—of anything dishonourable."

"But no man can act like that, sir, nowadays. Mr. Adair, there are laws—there is the constabulary."

"No doubt, there are," said Jack: "the yeomanry can also be called out upon occasion, though scarcely in this particular case. Magus cares nothing for what are called the authorities; so long as his sense of honour is satisfied, he would cheerfully submit to be cut into mince-meat."

"For Heaven's sake! don't joke, Mr. Adair; I can't stand it. My brain is giving way under this tremendous pressure. I was always nervous about firearms. My

mother was frightened by a horse-pistol just before my birth; it's constitutional. This demon in human form—if it *be* human, for in that black velvet suit of his, he looks the very picture of an aged Mephistopheles—has only given me twelve hours to turn about in. In my extremity, I turn to *you*. I can't ask Tyndall, because I said that about his marriage, and he would be naturally prejudiced against me in the matter; but you are a common friend of Mr. Magus and myself. Well, at all events" —for Jack was raising his eyebrows very high—"you wouldn't see me butchered in cold blood for having spoken a few words in jest, and nothing but the truth too."

"Unhappily for you, you see, that was where the offence lay," remarked Jack, rubbing his chin. "Why did you tell the truth? It is rather unusual with you, isn't it?"

"It was after dinner, you see," explained Mr. Jones excitedly, and quite unconscious of the sarcasm. "After a

couple of bottles of claret, one says anything; besides, I thought this old fellow was a mere nobody, kept here in charity, and without even a kick in him."

"Ah, that was a mistake; it is only his hair-triggers that have no kick in them. Well, I really don't see why you have come to me, Mr. Jones. Why not go to your friend, Mr. Allardyce? I should have thought he was the very man to see you through an affair of this kind."

"That's just it, my dear sir," exclaimed Jones hurriedly; "he'd make me fight; he'd take a devilish pleasure in seeing me stand up at fourteen paces to be riddled by —swan-shot, or whatever is used. But *you* —you're a Christian man; you are actuated by religion and morality, and all that. Here's my cheque-book; name your sum; and the same hour in which this terrible old man says: 'I won't shoot him; I'll let him go,' you shall have the money."

"Let me see," said Jack, setting down a few figures with his pencil on the face of

an ace of spades; "you told us at dinner one day that you had never less than four thousand pounds in your banker's hands, didn't you?"

"But if I did, it wasn't true," cried Mr. Jones hastily; "there is no subject a man's word is less to be relied on, you know, than upon his banking account. Besides, to take any large sum for such a service as I have asked of you, would be mere extortion —downright robbery, indeed. I'm astonished at you."

"I never said I was going to take a penny."

"But you are going to save my life?" inquired the other, pleadingly. "I would rather give you half I have in the world, or all, than lose my life."

"You seem to set rather a fancy price upon it," observed Jack quietly; "but I will not take advantage of that. At the same time, it will cost you a good deal, not only in money, but in reputation, to get out of this hobble."

"I don't care about that—at least, about the reputation part of it. If you choose to say I am not a gentleman, and therefore not worthy of being fired at by a man of blood (and a man of blood he is, with a vengeance), you are quite at liberty to do so. My father was a tailor by trade, between ourselves, and you can say I served in his shop."

"My good sir, you don't understand these nice distinctions," observed Adair, smiling grimly in his sleeve. "No matter what your father has been, or what you yourself have been before you came here, Mr. Magus has met you here as his equal in society, as the companion of his favourite nephew (whose motives with respect to matrimony you have been so imprudent as to malign), and you are put on the same level with any other guest at the dinner-table of your common host. He does you the honour of supposing you as worthy of his steel as a Bayard or a Howard; he's bent on fighting, that's certain. Now, how much will you give to save your skin?"

"Well, I should not have thought it of you, Mr. Adair; I should have said that you were incapable of a bribe. Yes, sir" —Jack's honest face was showing unmistakable signs of shame, and Mr. Jones pushed his supposed advantage accordingly —"I have often said to Allardyce: 'It's no use attempting to buy Adair.'"

"Why should you have wanted to buy me?" inquired Jack, looking up quickly.

"Oh, I only made the observation in a general way. I meant that you had not your price, like most men; that whatever you did—such as this little service for me, for instance, though I little thought then of having to ask it at your hands—you would do for nothing, out of your mere sense of duty."

"I see," said Jack dryly. "Well, I'm sorry to disabuse you of your good opinion; but I shall want three thousand pounds."

"Three thousand pounds for merely saying a good word for a friend! It's monstrous; it's out of the question. Why, it's

one hundred and fifty a year, for ever, in compensation for a quarter of an hour's conversation with a gentleman of family."

"Yes, it's a large sum, Mr. Jones; exactly the same sum, I believe, which you and your friend received from Arthur Tyndall, in compensation for your loss of time over a week's card-playing in London. These gains are comparative. Many persons, for instance, would rather play at loo for a week than argue with a man like Mr. Magus for a quarter of an hour, especially if they had good luck, great luck, quite exceptional luck."

"One can't tell what one's luck will be till one has tried," observed Mr. Jones carelessly. He was always prepared for such an insult as Adair was putting upon him, and minded it very little, since no victim was there to listen to it—and to profit by it; and besides, he had a much more perilous and weighty matter on his mind. "Now, in the case of this man Magus, you know what you are taking in

hand, and what will come of it. You can put me straight in this matter, and I don't care how you do it, if you only will."

"I can," said Adair coldly; "and nobody else *but* me could do it. Tyndall himself could not, even if you dared to ask him. When a jewel is rare, the cost is great; when it is unique, it becomes priceless. I am letting you off cheap at three thousand pounds."

"It is extortion!" cried Mr. Paul Jones, starting suddenly from his chair. "I won't submit to it. I'll appeal to the law; I'll hire a policeman—four policemen—to follow me night and day."

"Very good," said Adair coolly, tapping the ashes out of his pipe. "My ultimatum is refused. You will come again, before the twelve hours are out, and find the terms harder; or perhaps you have made up your mind to fight? In that case, remember about the biscuit and the cup of coffee, and bathe your eyes well with cold water, and don't wear flannel next your skin."

"Stop, Adair, stop!" cried Mr. Jones, appealingly. "I'll give you the money—I swear I will—if you will bring me a note from Mr. Magus to say that it is all made up."

"I have every confidence in your word, Mr. Paul Jones; but I prefer your bond. Before I move in this matter, I must have a cheque for the money, with a little memorandum in addition, to explain that it was for value received. You may stare at me as hard as you please: I daresay my nose does seem to you a little Jewish looking,—I'm *worse*, am I? Very good. I'm a robber, if you please—a gentleman of the road, whose motto is: 'Your money or your life?' Only, in this case, it's a division of labour: if I don't take your money, another man takes your life."

Mr. Paul Jones made a rapid mental calculation. He had already received half of these three thousand pounds from Tyndall, and two thousand four hundred pounds was still owing to him from that quarter.

After paying this enormous ransom, he would still, therefore, be nine hundred pounds to the good, even if Allardyce should not moderate his demands, out of consideration to his friend's calamity. But no—he would never do that; and, on the whole, it would be better not to tell him. The merciless banter to which such a confession was sure to subject him would be insupportable.

Mr. Paul Jones took out his cheque-book and wrote an order to John Adair, Esq., for three thousand pounds sterling.

"So far, so good," said Jack. "And now give me up those 'I O U 's."

"What do you mean? Are you mad?"

"Not at all; my brain is capable of precise calculation. You have in your possession—probably in your pocket-book—acknowledgments from my friend Arthur Tyndall to the amount of four thousand eight hundred pounds. I have kept a separate account of your transactions with him. I believe I am quite correct. But

the sum may be larger, in which case you must pay it. I must have it all."

"What! Seven thousand eight hundred for speaking to Mr. Magus?"

"Not at all, my dear sir. This four eight nought nought is quite a distinct matter."

"And what, in the devil's name, have you to do with it?"

"Nothing—no more than I had to do with the three thousand pounds. To tell you the truth, I am acting towards you in a very friendly manner. I am about to turn away the wrath of the Great Magus from no other motive than benevolence. This cheque is not for myself at all; it is neither mine nor yours; it is Tyndall's. I thought there might be some difficulty in getting you to disgorge what you had already robbed him of; whereas the 'I O U's are of less consequence; he has only to disown them."

"You must be drunk—you must be exceedingly drunk—you can't know what you

are saying," ejaculated Mr. Jones, but with a tremor in his tone and a pallor on his face that belied his confident words. "These memoranda of Tyndall's are as much my own as the sovereigns I have got in my purse."

"That depends upon how they have been come by. What a curious spot this is, is it not?"

Jack was holding the ace of clubs face downwards, so that the light played full upon it. Mr. Jones' florid face grew paler and paler.

"I see no particular spot," stammered he: "it's a spotted card."

"That's because you're not holding it in your own hand," observed Jack, quietly. "If you dealt these cards, you would not fail to remark, I think, that there was something peculiar about the backs of all the aces, likewise of the kings, and queens, and knaves. Nothing, however, let us confess, can be fairer than the plain cards. You had better give up those 'I O U's."

"I—I—don't understand you."

"Then you are trifling with your intelligence, which is considerable. These 'I O U's are, under the circumstances, waste paper. Mr. Allardyce and yourself are 'blown upon'—as I have delicately hinted—'burst up,' 'uncovered'—I quote from your own Sharper's vocabulary: you are both 'spotted,' like the cards themselves."

"Mr. Wynn Allardyce had nothing whatever to do with it," exclaimed Mr. Jones. He wiped his forehead, his chin, his throat, which were all in a state of profuse perspiration; he felt as if he had been drinking antimonial wine to excess, and topping up with spirits of nitre.

"I don't believe it," said Jack, decisively. "On the contrary, I will pay you the compliment of remarking that I believe Mr. Allardyce is a more infamous scoundrel than yourself. Do you still hesitate to give me those 'I O U's?" Jack rose and locked the door. "Very good: then I shall take them; I'll have them if I have

to strip you to the skin. You may call it Robbery with violence, if you like : *I* call it Restitution.—You'll give them up? I thought you would. It is the peculiar virtue of the scoundrel to know when he is beaten. Poor Tyndall would have fought against overwhelming odds till he had lost every shilling to you two villains."

"Here are the 'I O U's, Mr. Adair," said Jones, producing them ; "but I most solemnly swear to you that Allardyce was ignorant of the unfair advantage which you have detected. His gains have been small, and, for all he knew, were solely attributable to good fortune. This is the simple truth, upon my honour."

"Nobody can doubt *that*, of course," observed Adair, dryly : "but it is curious that my first hint of this knavery was suggested by something that fell from Mr. Allardyce's own lips. It is not of much consequence, since, if any man sits down to play with Mr. Paul Jones' friend and companion again, he must be a fool indeed. But here

is the memorandum I spoke about, drawn up so as to include you both. You must sign it, if you please, for friend and partner."

"I will sign nothing to Mr. Allardyce's prejudice," said Mr. Paul Jones, positively; "he is no partner of mine, nor has he ever been."

"Do you mean to say that you alone knew of those spotted cards?"

"I do. I ordered five hundred similar packs of the maker, and marked them all; then, carefully resealing them, I sent them back, requesting the same number of plain white ones. I knew that he supplied Tyndall, and that he liked the spotted ones."

"I see," said Jack, taking up the cards. "So these are your old friends again?"

Mr. Jones nodded his head sulkily; he had made a clean breast of it, and yet he was not happy. If he could have killed Adair without discovery, he would have stabbed him to the heart as soon as looked

at him—in fact, sooner, for he kept his face studiously averted from the other's gaze.

"You must sign this little acknowledgment of your ingenuity," observed Jack, pushing over to him a piece of paper across the table. "I have put it all down to your own credit, since you will have it so."

"You have got the money back," answered the other, doggedly. "Why do you want this?"

"To save your life," answered Jack, coolly. "I must show it to Mr. Magus, and when he perceives that you confess yourself to be a cheat and a card-sharper, he will be the last man in the world to wish to fight you."

"But you might have told him that at first," exclaimed Mr. Jones, pathetically.

"That's true," said Jack, with a grim chuckle; "but business first, and pleasure afterwards. If I may venture to add a piece of advice gratis, I would recommend you not to put in an appearance to-morrow morning, Mr. Jones. Tyndall is very trust-

ful; but when he finds he has been deceived he is apt to be rather violent."

"I've an engagement to-morrow in town which I ought to keep," remarked Mr. Jones, thoughtfully. "Yes; I think I'll go."

Jack chuckled again.

"Are you sure Allardyce hasn't an engagement also?"

"Quite sure," answered the other, earnestly. "I have already exonerated him from all complicity in—what has happened."

As he turned to go without a farewell—"Had you not better take these pretty cards?" suggested Jack. "You have only four hundred and fifty-two packs left in the maker's hands." But Mr. Paul Jones had left the room and slammed the door before the sentence could be finished. "I'm afraid I've put him out," said Jack Adair. Then he lit his eleventh pipe, and pondered. "This is an excellent night's work," soliloquised he, "and takes the rope off poor Tyndall's neck. Shall I tell him

at once, and so give him a good night's rest, or shall I wait till morning? It will be better to let this rogue take himself off first, or there may be a row. As for the other, guilty or not, he can do no more harm; like a pair of scissors, cheats can only act in concert, and now there is but one Black Leg left. Yes; better wait till morning."

Better *not* wait till morning, excellent Jack; better go at once and see thy friend, and take the rope off *now;* for he is on the very scaffold, if thou only didst but know it, and about to leap into an eternity of woe!

CHAPTER II.

IN THE SUMMER-HOUSE.

"THAT will do, gentlemen; I am obliged to you," had been the words of Arthur Tyndall when he found himself a debtor to his false friends for nearly five thousand pounds; and he spoke them in the fulness, as well as the bitterness of his heart. He *was* obliged to them: he did feel thankful to them for having so piled up the burden of misfortune, that he could no longer in honour ask another to help him to bear it. He had passed the limit of indebtedness which could, even by utmost stretch of

conscience, be concealed from Helen. It was impossible that he could permit her to take, unconsciously, the hand of a hopelessly ruined man. Of course, her fortune could easily discharge this obligation, as he had looked to it to discharge a less; but his conscience had been growing more and more tender upon this point of late—ever since he had seen Jenny—and this last stroke of ill luck (or good luck, for he was not quite sure which it was) had brought matters to a crisis. He would tell Helen all, and formally release her from her engagement; and then ?—well, he could not answer that question decisively. It took him the whole night to think about it, during which he never closed his eyes.

Now he saw Helen, with indignant cheeks and reproachful looks; now he saw Jenny, sad and tearful, but not contemptuous of him; though she would not permit him to explain himself, he fancied that she understood his perplexities, and took pity on him. Neither Helen nor Jenny was

now for him. He must needs be once more an exile from home and country, living on a mere crust, till enough could be saved out of his income to pay off those dreadful "I O U"s. He would have to make up some story, to account for his going away, to simple Uncle Magus. That ancient gentleman had taken a great fancy to Helen, or, at all events, always paid her the most courteously paternal attentions; it would not be easy to explain to him (since his own pecuniary embarrassment must be carefully concealed from the proud old man) how matters stood. Mrs. Tyndall and Blanche would consider his behaviour very strange and unjustifiable, and their opinion was of consequence to him. Above all, what would Jack say? He attached more importance to Jack's censure than he would have done to the unanimous anathema of the bench of bishops. He felt that Jack and he could never be such friends again after this, though Jack would love him always. Why had he not listened

to him in the old days, when he had urged him to tell his father all—all about Jenny? If the worst had happened then, it could not have been so bad as the pass to which things had come to now. He could have married her *then*, and gone out as a humble emigrant, and made his way in the New World; but he had gone out alone, and forgotten her, and misspent his time and his money among worthless companions; and now it was too late to ask her to be his wife—for he was worse than penniless: a load of debt—and that of the worst kind, a debt of honour—was hanging around him, which it would take many a year of his crippled income to discharge. It was his own fault from first to last that he found himself thus poverty-stricken, humiliated, and without hope or comfort, and he knew it; but, bitter as the reflection was, it was not so painful as the thought of what his wayward selfishness had inflicted on one innocent girl, and was about to inflict upon another.

As for himself, what did it matter? He would go back to the wild life he had led for the last five years, and stay away for good and all from home. For what home was there now to welcome him? Friendless, loveless, an outcast by his own act, what was there for him to live for now? The best thing that could happen for everybody—even for himself, perhaps—would be that he should be polished off by a Yankee bowie-knife, or wiped out by a Malay crease, in some free-fight, should the chance of more honourable warfare be denied him. Then Cousin George would succeed to Swansdale, and not refuse, it was to be hoped, to let Uncle Magus live out the remainder of his days at the Cottage. And Helen would marry some respectable and domestic man, who didn't play loo; and Jenny—— It was strange that whenever his thoughts recurred to Jenny they broke down, just as his speech might have done had he been talking of her. There was a solution of continuity; schemes and re-

flections alike vanished from his mind, and in their place came some remembrance of the past, the recollection of some scene (visible, perhaps, from his very window, had it been day) where she had held sweet converse with him, smiled upon him, kissed him even—such as the chalk-pit, and the tree beneath which he had bidden her farewell—and he would give himself up to these dreams as an opium-eater gives himself to his drug, though he knows the waking will be terrible.

When morning dawned, he took a bath (which made him shiver instead of glow, as usual), and dressed, and let himself out of doors, as he had done before. But on this occasion the hour was too early even for Giles; there was no scrape of the besom on the path, or sweep of the scythe on the lawn; the dull, importunate beat of the lasher alone was heard. Yes, one other sound struck on his ear a minute after he had left the house—the stealthy closing of the front door. Under any other circum-

stances, he would have returned to inquire into so strange an incident; if he had done so now, the whole course of his future—and of another's future—would have been altered; for he would have met Mr. Paul Jones in the act of leaving Swansdale, face to face, and learned that he was his debtor no longer; but, as it was, it seemed to concern Arthur Tyndall nothing as to who left the Hall, or entered it. He crossed the lawn with rapid steps, and took the path that skirted the weir—not leading to the lock, but away from it. It was an unfrequented one at any hour (for the tow-path ran on the other side), which was one reason why he chose it; the other was, that it awoke no too tender memories of the past. The meetings between himself and Jenny had always taken place between the *Welcome* and the lock, never below the latter. Here he was only reminded of certain incidents of boyhood, the recollection of which period, notwithstanding some sentimental deliverances to the contrary,

are generally exempt from the sting of regret.

Here was the tree with the forked branches, in which, with some aid from the village carpenter, he had once built "a house," a one-roomed edifice, at least, thatched without and boarded within, and having in the centre of its floor a trap-door, that concealed a tiny cellar—the pride of the whole structure—in which he had been wont to keep smallish beer. The master-builder had long been dead, and all that remained of this once favourite retreat looked little better than a deserted rook's nest. But it was still the home of many memories. Here was the old osier beneath which the big trout used to lie, and where he had stood by the hour, with the new rod and basket that his father had given him on his birthday, throwing the flies that Uncle Magus made, and in whose hands they were such "killers."

How often, in this very spot, had he forecast his future—an impossible one, for it

had been without a woman in it—and hesitated whether he should be a field-marshal or an archbishop, or (in less ambitious moments, and after perusal of the *Tales of the Genii*) a merchant of Bagdad doing a great business in the pearl line, and whose ordinary currency was purses of sequins. And now, at eight-and-twenty, his prospects were quite as vague, though not so brilliant. How often had he sat beside that broad, clear stream, flowing on to-day precisely as it had done then, and followed some floating object with his eyes as it was hurried towards the sea—that sea which he had never seen, and could not picture for himself, and how he had longed to be hurried with it, and to cross the ocean, and behold new worlds, with forests, temples (such as were on the Chinese fire-screens in the library), tigers, crocodiles, and cocoanuts. Well, he had seen all these things, without thinking much of them, and was now about to see them again, or other things equally without charm, for life was emptied of all promise.

Here was the thicket where he had played at robbers with the rector's son (not Glyddon's, of course, but his predecessor), and from whence they got the wood for bonfires on Guy Fawkes' Day; and here was the summer-house at the very extremity of the Swansdale grounds, where, as children, he and this same companion had been allowed, "for a treat," to boil their kettle and make tea. What had become of that lad, who had been once so dear to him, and with whom he had fought so regularly until it was clearly proved that he was the better man, when somehow his interest in him died out? And what was that old story, and who had told it to him, about his own mother having at one time in her youth been beloved by that lad's father before she married Squire Tyndall? How sad and strange were all those memories of the dead and gone among which his mind was drifting, and how sombre was the picture which human life presented to him, set in the past as in a

frame! In the contemplation of it, however, he had wholly forgotten his own troubles, when suddenly the doorway of the summer-house in which he was sitting was darkened, and he looked up and saw Helen standing there, fresh, and bright, and fair as the morn itself.

"What a good boy you are for early rising, Arthur. I really thought that I had got the start of you to-day by at least an hour, but—— What's the matter, darling?"

He had risen and taken both her hands in his, and was holding them, fast indeed, but without that earnest pressure which she knew so well; and his face was sad, and his eyes full of sorrowful import.

"There is much the matter, Helen—with *me*," he said: "more than you can guess—more almost than you can believe—because you have a good opinion of me."

"I have, Arthur, and nothing can change that—nothing—*nothing*." Her voice was laden with tenderness, but there was a simplicity in its tone which touched him

more than even *that.* This woman believed in him implicitly ; she had never conceived of him as being a profligate and a ne'er-do-well ; her assuring smile defied him to convince her to the contrary even with his own lips.

"If I had not seen you here, Miss Somers——"

She turned so ghastly pale, and her hand seemed to cling to his with such a despairing clutch, as he thus addressed her, that for very pity's sake he altered his cold style.

" If you had not come here, Helen, it was my intention to seek an early opportunity of seeing you alone this morning to tell you something—some very bad news of the man to whom your hand is promised, and who is unworthy of it."

She shook her head, and motioned with her lips, as though she would have denied that it could be so ; but that word, " Miss Somers," had paralysed her. Arthur led her to a seat, and placed himself beside

her. Her eyes never left his face for a single instant.

"When I first asked you in marriage, Helen, you will remember that I told you that I was not a rich man, and confessed to you that my habits had been extravagant, and that I had been reckless, foolish, improvident; but I did not tell you the whole truth, that I was an irreclaimable as well as unlucky gamester."

"I knew it," she whispered; "I knew that quite well."

There was no despair, nor even despondency, in her tone; it was evident that she was stating a fact to be deplored indeed, but one which she had already taken into the account, as it were, and made up her mind for. Arthur had thought it better to fire his heaviest shotted gun at first, and so to sink all hope at once within her; and lo, she had been quite prepared for the discharge, and seemed no worse for it! This result disconcerted him extremely. Was it possible that any woman could so love him,

that she had been content to be his wife, notwithstanding that such a revelation as he had just made had been no news to her ?

" You don't know what a gamester is ; you don't know what a marriage with such a man may mean, girl," said Arthur, almost fiercely. He was struggling against the tenderness with which her self-sacrificing affection, and simplicity, and beauty were inspiring him. " How should you ?"

" It may mean ruin, Arthur," said she calmly ; " my mother told me so, and I believed her. Is this all your bad news ?"

" You talk of ruin, Helen, as though it did not mean the wreck of happiness, as well as of everything else. I saw you were annoyed the other day, when I lost but a few pounds——"

" That was wrong of me," interrupted she earnestly—" very wrong of me. But do not punish me with death for an offence so slight."

" Death, Helen ! What do you mean ?" asked he.

"Never mind," replied she, with the same ghastly look as she had worn before. "Don't ask me; but go on."

"I say, if it annoyed you because I lost a few pounds, what would you say if I were to lose hundreds—thousands?"

"Nothing, Arthur; nothing at all, believe me. Whatever you may lose henceforth, you shall never hear a reproach from me."

That she meant what she said was clear; it was also becoming clear to Arthur why she meant it—why she clung to him, while he was confessing his unworthiness, more closely than she had ever done when he was pouring forth his protestations of love. She was resolved, at all hazards, not to lose him.

"You think and hope it may not happen, Helen. You know not the depths of folly into which such a man as I describe is capable of descending. Let me give you an instance, not of what may happen, but of what has already taken place. I have paid away three thousand pounds of losses

at cards since my return to England, and I owe five thousand more. I lost a thousand pounds last night while you were sleeping —dreaming, perhaps, of me as your pure mind has pictured me, not as I am——"

"It matters nothing," she broke in; "though your debt were five times as great, I still could pay it. And how could I spend my fortune better than in helping you? What use were a fortune to me, if you did not need it? I would never ask you to stint yourself of a single pleasure; and if this be indeed a pleasure, take it. Perhaps luck will turn; and if it does not turn, at least there will be your Helen to comfort you. O Arthur! is this loss the only ill news you had to tell me? If so, I thank Heaven for it, for somehow, in your look and tone at first, I thought I saw—but it is *not* there now—I thought I saw I was exiled from your heart, and that would have been loss and doom indeed."

The passionate earnestness and pathos of her tone took Arthur's soul by storm.

Looking down upon the beautiful face that supplicated him thus tenderly, he could not but stoop down and kiss it, and clasp to his own that self-sacrificing and generous heart, which only beat for him. He dared not say: "I have not told you half; I love another," for fear it should stop beating at such fatal news, for ever. "There is no worse news," he said, "than what I have told you, Helen."

Half-fainting in his arms for joy, she blessed her fate, and thanked him. She had never known, she said, how dear he had been to her until that moment when his face had seemed to be so strangely set against her, and yet she had loved him from the first, and had never ceased to love —all sharp words, and pouting looks, and perilous rebukes (that should never again be uttered), notwithstanding. She was his, and his alone, and ever would be his while life was in her.

And he, on his part, was not silent, but touched (as well he might be) by her unex-

acting trustfulness, made solemn promise that, for the future, he would risk nought at play of hers, nor his; nor ever game again. "Your generosity has quite subdued me, darling, and exorcised this demon from my breast," he said. "I cast it from me."

"And take me instead," she murmured.

"Nay; *you* were always there."

What *could* he say with those blue eyes swimming in grateful tears beneath his own, and while she nestled in his bosom like a dove?

CHAPTER III.

TOO LATE.

IT was still early when Arthur and Helen returned together from their interview in the summer-house, and they were both surprised to meet Mr. Allardyce between it and the Hall. His habits were not early, nor had he been yet known to be down-stairs within half-an-hour of the sounding of the breakfast gong: as, however, he drank claret at that meal—for his tastes were continental—he did not suffer the penalties of lukewarm coffee and weak tea, which otherwise would undoubtedly have

been inflicted on him by Mrs. Tyndall. She did not like people to be late at meals, and especially young men, although she spoiled them in so many ways. She never kept her dinners waiting more than ten minutes, "to allow for the difference of the clock," for anybody. Not that she was wanting in courtesy, as some may thence suppose, but for precisely the opposite reason; she was not so discourteous as to spoil the dinner of half-a-dozen sensible persons for the sake of one or two fools who thought it fine to be late.

Mr. Wynn Allardyce was no fool, nor did he think it fine to be late; but the comfort of no human being beside himself having ever entered into his mind, and being by nature slothful, he was seldom in time for anything. As for getting up in the morning, he saw no reason for doing so, except upon some festival of his church —such as the Derby Day. Under the present unsatisfactory and imperfect conditions of life, it was quite unusual to get

any Play before noon at earliest; and, like an artificial fountain, his only work was play, which was very literally meat, drink, and clothing to him, since it supplied him with the means of procuring them. And yet here was Mr. Wynn Allardyce up and out of doors at eight o'clock in the morning, wondering, doubtless (like the fabled Rum-tumfoozelum), at the works of Providence, which were all new to him at that hour. His delicate kid boots had rarely "brushed the dew away to meet the sun upon the upland lawn," when so far from its meridian as at present, and he found it absolutely necessary to mitigate the overpowering perfume of the flowers by cigarettes.

"This is charming," he said, as he politely saluted the lovers; "this is charming of you, and as it should be. I have never even read in books, of anything so touching as this walking out together before breakfast-time. It reminds one of the Garden of Eden. Quite lackadaisical—I mean paradisiacal—upon my honour."

"It is very pleasant," said Helen, coldly, "and nothing new to those who have been healthily brought up."

The herb valerian had lost its flavour for her for the present: she didn't like this banter, which somehow seemed to take the gloss off her new-born happiness.

"You are right, Miss Somers, as you generally are. I'm a very unwholesome person, and all wrong every way. I have only just sufficient grace left to admire what is good in others. Have you seen our friend Adair this morning, either of you?"

His tone was careless, and in curious contradiction to the expression of his face, which was eager, and even anxious. His glance wandered restlessly from one to the other so quickly, that it must needs have intercepted any glance of significance, had such passed between them.

"No," said Arthur. "Jack is not such an early bird, though, unlike yourself, he is always in time for his groundsel. Have

you backed yourself to beat him at getting up this morning ?"

"No ; it's not that ; but I wish you to read this letter, in fairness to myself, before you see Adair.—Pray, forgive me for all this mystery, Miss Somers ; there should be no secrets between Tyndall and yourself, I am aware, but this is a matter that no lady should be troubled with."

"There has been no quarrel among you gentlemen, I hope ?" exclaimed Helen nervously. "It struck me yesterday that there was a coolness between your Uncle Magus, Arthur, and Mr. Paul Jones——"

"There was such, I believe, Miss Somers," interposed Allardyce ; "but I can answer for it, upon my honour, that it exists no longer, for the cause of quarrel has been removed.—You will grant me that little favour, Tyndall ?"

"To read this letter before I see Jack ? Certainly, my good fellow, certainly."

He put it in his breast-pocket ; and Allardyce passed on, remarking, that since

he *was* out at so premature an hour, he should take that constitutional before breakfast so strenuously advocated by writers on indigestion. His tone was so nervous and his laugh so forced, that Arthur and Helen both observed it.

"There has been a row of some sort," said he to himself. "I hope Jack hasn't insulted him. I won't have any man insulted in my house upon mere suspicion. Allardyce is as straight as a die, or I should have found it out long ago."

"Mark my words," said Helen: "that note has some unpleasant reference to Mr. Paul Jones. I never liked that man, Arthur."

"Well, he is not a lady's man, my dear," laughed Tyndall, "it must be owned; and my notion is, now that I have given up play, that he will not trouble us much with his company; but there is no real harm in Paul, 'my pretty Poll,' as Allardyce calls him; and, at all events, Lardy would be the last man to write anything against him."

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"May I see the letter, Arthur?"

"Well, no, my darling. I think that would be hardly fair to Allardyce, after what he said."

"He said there should be no secret between us."

"So he did, dear; he was obliged to say that, you know; but he added, that the matter in question was one that a lady should not be troubled with. I understand that to mean, that the subject is a private one—to be confined to himself and me. Don't you see, my darling?"

It was evident that "my darling" did not see it. Her curiosity was not to be gratified; and what was worse, the proprietary rights which she already imagined herself to possess in this young man—and which were as dear to her as the rights of property to a lord of the soil—were threatened. What could this matter be which was to be kept from her, yet shared with her Arthur by a mere acquaintance? Could it possibly—a spasm shot across her heart—have reference to a woman?

"As you please, Arthur," said she coldly. "Perhaps I had better go indoors, and leave you to examine this wonderful document by yourself."

"Well, perhaps so, my darling. Lardy seemed to be in a deuce of a way about it, and it takes a good deal to put him out, so I suppose it's something important."

"It ought to be, since it separates *us*—"

"For five minutes!" interrupted Arthur, laughing: "not a moment more will I give to this fellow."

She was gone, and had left him in an alcove cut in the box-tree wall, very convenient for privacy; and yet he made no haste to open the letter, which was addressed to himself in Allardyce's hand. It was the first time he had found himself alone since his lot in life had been settled for him; it was only natural that his own affairs should take precedence in his thoughts, and they did so. A few hours ago, he had trodden that very walk in doubt and perplexity as to his future, in

doubt even as to how he should exist; and now it was arranged that he was to live on at Swansdale with Helen for his wife. Her generosity and devotion had conquered him, and he did not regret it even yet, even though her fair form was no longer close beside him with its eloquence of hand, and lip, and eye. She had been very good to him, very tender to his faults and follies, and the least he could do in return was to make her a good husband, faithful in thought as well as act, and wholly devoted to her interests. (That was not a very passionate way of putting it, perhaps; but there had been a good deal of passionate protestation that morning, and one's capacity in that way is limited.) It was a pity that dearest Helen was so soon put out, and when she was, that she showed it so very plainly; but that she was a thorough good girl, he felt certain, and would make a far better wife to him than he deserved. And in the meantime, thanks to her, what a load was lifted from his mind with respect to

that debt of five thousand pounds that was owing to his friend Jones. This reminded him of the letter, the contents of which Helen had predicted would have some reference to that gentleman, and he broke the seal (for it bore the unusual safeguard of sealing-wax), and opened it. The envelope had no less than three inclosures—a note from Allardyce, a statement in the handwriting of Jones, and a cheque for three hundred and eighty pounds from the former gentleman, payable to Arthur Tyndall. The note, which was dated 1 A.M. that morning, ran as follows :

"My dear Tyndall,—I have just discovered, to my inexpressible horror, that we have had a cheat and card-sharper for our companion for the last week, and how long before that it is impossible to say. His villany, it appears, was discovered by Adair last night, to whom he had grace enough to acknowledge that I myself was wholly ignorant of his malpractices. I

compelled him, however, to sign his name to the inclosed statement; not, I hope, that I need any such exculpation in your eyes, but for the satisfaction of those who have less knowledge of me. This scoundrel swears, as you will see, that he never used unfair means against you except under your own roof (and what an abyss of villany such a confession reveals!); but it is quite impossible that I should retain a shilling of what I have ever chanced to win in his company. I therefore inclose you a cheque for the exact total which you have lost to me at cards from first to last. It is not much; for it seems this fellow was too greedy to let much slip through his own fingers, even to avert suspicion from himself. I cannot paint the annoyance and disgust I feel at this astounding revelation; for though I shall have the sympathy of every man of honour who is acquainted with the facts, I well know how my character will suffer at the hands of many a sneaking scoundrel, whose poisonous words

may fall into ears that I would fain should hear no evil of me. When I think of it all, Tyndall, I almost wonder that the wretch who has so wronged you should have escaped with his life. That you, like myself, should have been made a cat's-paw of by such a vulgar ruffian must be humiliating enough; but you will easily understand that in my case I feel this ten times more bitter, inasmuch as I have known him longer, trusted him more, and, above all, through that very intimacy have subjected myself to a suspicion of collusion that makes me sick to think of. I leave it, however, to your honour, honesty, and friendliness to do me full justice in this matter, and I am sure I do not trust to them in vain.—Always yours most faithfully,

"Wynn Allardyce."

"The infernal rascal!" exclaimed Arthur, starting to his feet with the intention of running into the house.—"Hollo, Jack!"—who should he run against on the terrace

but Adair himself, who was out in search of him—"Where *is* this scoundrel?"

"Allardyce?"

"No; Jones, of course. Has he dared to stay under my roof?"

"Not after last night, old fellow; no—he's off. You know all about it, it seems; I thought you would."

"Yes, Allardyce has written to me; a most frank and manly letter, I must say." They drew back into the alcove, where Adair read the communication in question, and Tyndall Mr. Jones' statement, which he had been too impatient for revenge to do before. It told all that we know respecting the marked cards, and also solemnly acquitted Allardyce of all collusion in the matter.

"You see this quite acquits poor Lardy," observed Arthur; "and though, of course, I shan't accept his cheque, I don't think he could have behaved better or more straightforwardly, under the circumstances. It must be a devilish galling thing, poor fellow."

"Very," said Jack dryly; "it must be deuced unpleasant to him to have to disgorge three hundred and eighty pounds, if he really supposes you are going to accept it. But then, you see, you are not."

"You know I don't mean *that*, Adair; I wish you would not be so uncharitable. It is no wonder that Allardyce begged me to read his letter before I saw you."

"Quite right," said Jack, cheerfully: "he was reasonably afraid of my dropping what he calls 'poisonous words' into your ear."

"Well, my dear fellow," answered Tyndall, "I must beg you as a favour not to drop them. Perhaps I ought not to have let you read the letter: Allardyce has put himself and his honour in my hands, and I accept the trust. His quarrel is my quarrel so far."

"My dear Tyndall, I am not going to quarrel; but you must not expect my views to change quite so rapidly as yours. You must permit me to hold the same opinion

that you yourself held up to, say twelve o'clock last night."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, 'Allardyce is as straight as a die, and Jones is as straight as a die,' said you; *ergo*, Allardyce is about as straight as Jones. There, don't be angry; but let us agree to differ. Time will show. In the meanwhile, here is money." He took out of his pocket the "I O U"s that Jones had given up, and also that gentleman's cheque for four thousand eight hundred pounds.

"What is this?" cried Arthur, looking over them. He had suddenly grown deadly pale. His friend imagined that this arose from the shock of joy at finding himself relieved from his embarrassments, and even possessed of a small fortune.

"It is a trifle of seven thousand eight hundred pounds, my dear fellow; but only your own money back, after all. Of course, this fellow had no claim to a sixpence of it; but, nevertheless, let me tell you, it required some little *finesse* on my part to compel

restitution. I'll tell you all about it at another time. But there goes the gong, and you had better be early at the breakfast-table, to prevent people chattering about this scandal: the flitting of our 'pretty Poll' this morning is sure to be a matter of some speculation."

"You are right," said Arthur, slowly, and moving mechanically towards the Hall. "Let us go in."

"Well, I must say you take your good luck more philosophically than you used to take your ill," observed Jack, with some touch of irritation. "I am not a commission agent, but I did expect a little per-centage in the way of gratitude for having saved your three thousand pounds out of the fire, not to mention the collaring those 'I O U's."

"My dear Jack, forgive me," said Arthur, wringing the other's hand. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart; but—"

The completion of the sentence was a sigh; and the next moment they came

upon the ladies, who had collected on the croquet lawn, on to which the French windows of the breakfast-room opened. Had he ended with words, the sentence would perhaps have been: "but this unlooked-for prosperity comes too late."

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER THE SYCAMORE.

SIX weeks have passed since the events recorded in our last chapter, and the haunted chalk-pit of Swansdale is compelled to echo the notes of a merry peal; over wood and water, wedding news is dancing, making many a rustic maiden's ear to tingle, and many a gossip's tongue to wag. There is feasting below stairs at the Hall to-day, and old Giles strolls about the lawn, for once an idle man, with his hands in his pockets, and a huge white favour on his breast. Uncle Magus (for the first time

these twenty years) has left his rose-embowered cottage, and gone to London Town to give the young folks his blessing at the altar, when the priest has done with them ; and the priest is Mr. Glyddon.

"A nice day the young squire has got," says old Jacob Renn to his daughter, as they sit at their afternoon meal, with the cottage door open, through which the music of the bells breaks in pell-mell. "If happy's the bride on whom the sun shines, Miss Helen—she's been missus, however, these three hours, I reckon—ought to be most uncommon happy."

"I trust she may be," says Jenny, steadily, not looking at her father, but gazing out at the blue air, as if the bells were hung in the heavens, and she was watching the spirits who rang them.

"What's the use of trusting, lass ? Let's drink her health and his. There's a glass of sherry wine for you such as was never drunk in a lock-keeper's cottage before, I'll answer for it, and seldom in a gentleman's

house. It comes from the best bin in the old *Welcome.* Here's to the young couple: 'Long may they live, and happy may they be, blessed with a good large familee,' as the saying is. Why don't you drink, lass?"

"I did drink, father."

"You don't call that a drink! No wonder they names you Jenny Wren, for 'twas more like the sip of a bird. When you've wine like this, you should hold it up to the light, so—*that* pleases the eye; then lean your head back, and tilt the glass gently, so—*that* pleases the palate; then think over what you have done a bit, for you've been a-swallowing gold, or leastways a good two shillings' worth of the best amontillado, which is the mother of sherry."

"It's very nice, father, I've no doubt; but I am afraid it's thrown away upon me. The heat oppresses me. Would you mind my leaving you for a few minutes to sit by the lasher in the cool?"

"Not *I*, lass, since you leave me in such good company."

Jenny rose and went out through the garden, stopping on her way to pluck a rose. If this was to show herself calm and unagitated in mind, the action was lost upon the old man, for he was looking at her unemptied glass.

"What fools women are!" was his reflection. "The idea of leaving wine like that! But Jenny always threw away her chances. It is my belief she might ha' been a peeress by this time, if she had cared to play the cards that were dealt to her. She might certainly have had Mr. Arthur—not that he was much of a catch, as it has turned out; and now she has only to hold up her finger, and the rector would put the ring on. A lord, a squire, a rector: well, that's pretty well for one young woman, and she but an innkeeper's daughter. But what sort of an innkeeper? Ah, there's the rub. Well, it's not for me to boast; but I don't suppose there ever *was* such a landlord of an inn before or since. Certainly not since, to judge by that fellow who has

got the old place now. No manners, no graces, no keeping of hisself up before everybody—such as I had the gift for. Why, I've seen a matter of six young lords a-dining at the old house at once, and every one on 'em had a 'Well, Jacob, how *are* you?' for me, when I brought in the first dish. Jenny had that gift too. No princess could have held her own better, or taught them their place. Still, as a father, I felt the inn was bad for her, with its rough river-folk, and queer comers and goers; and so, when a good offer came, I parted with it. It is not every father that would have done that."

It might have occurred to Mr. Jacob Renn that the same objections that he thus urged against the *Welcome*, as a residence for his princess, were at least equally strong against the lock cottage; but amontillado is not only the "mother of sherry," but when taken freely, as in the present case, of self-satisfaction and complacency.

"Yes, I have done my duty, I flatter

myself, in that station of life to which Providence has called me, and especially as a father. I have never inferred—interfered with that girl, but just let her take her own way, and a queer way it is. Why, notwithstanding all her good looks—and when a girl has *them*, she generally don't care to have anything else—she's cleverer than the member for the county; and as for study, the parson himself daren't tackle her in theol—theology. I wonder, by-the-by, if she could explain what hiccups was sent for? It can't be of any *use*, that's certain, for it only spills the wine, and I don't believe as anybody thinks it a but—a beauty. I've got eight shillings-worth of amontillado in my inside, and should be perfectly happy if it wasn't for hic, if it wasn't for hic—

'Hic, Hæc, Hoc;
Lay him on the block.'

That's what the young lord from Eton used to sing to Jenny, a song full of the Latin he

had learned at school; but she would only laugh at him. 'Lords shouldn't be laughed at,' said I; 'it's disrespectful, and contrary to the Cat—Cat—— "To behave myself reverently to all my betters," says the Church Catechism;' and old Jacob Renn was allus a churchman. Hark at them bells! One more glass, one more glass, *one* more glass: that's what they're a-saying on; and I obeys 'em."

Jacob Renn obeyed them so loyally, that he enriched his interior by exactly twenty shillings' worth of the "mother of sherry" —drained the last dregs, in fact, including the contents of his daughter's glass, and then fell fast asleep in his chair.

In the meantime, Jenny was seated beneath the sycamore behind the cottage, and hidden from all save those whom pleasure or business might chance to bring to the lasher which thundered at her side, a dam with a low flood-gate alone interposing between herself and it. But her ear heard nothing but the bells, which, instead of

inviting her to take one more glass of the amontillado, importunately reminded her of the auspicious occasion which they celebrated. "*Ar*thur Tyndall's married," "*Ar*thur Tyndall's married," "*Ar*thur Tyndall's married," was their reiterated tidings, and every word of it seemed to beat itself into her brain.

"Now that he is married," murmured she, "I must return him this. Why did I not give it him before?"

She took a little anchor of gold from her bosom, in whose white depths it was wont to lie hidden, and contemplated it with sorrowful eyes.

"Perhaps it was my keeping *that* which made him look and speak so when I met him on the bridge. Well, he shall have it back now. Yes, my one jewel, my sole treasure for so many years, you must go! There are the letters, too, which he wrote me from college, that I have kissed and wept over so often: must he have those also? May he not conclude I have lost or

burned them? No; he cannot. He forgot *me*, but he cannot think that I ever forgot him. Burned? Lost? No; he will know better than that. They must go back. I will give them him without a word, when I see him next."

Here she hurriedly thrust the trinket back whence it came, and started to her feet.

"What?" exclaimed a voice of astonishment; "Alice Renn, and without a book in her hand!"

It was Mr. Glyddon who addressed her; and notwithstanding that he was an efficient member of the village choral society, his tone was unusually musical as he did so. It was always gentle when he spoke to the lock-keeper's daughter, but also somewhat sad. It was gentle now, even to tenderness; but there was a buoyancy in the tone (or so it seemed to Jenny) which she had never noticed before, and it jarred upon her ear.

"I was looking at the book of Nature,

Mr. Glyddon, which has more to tell us than you quite give it credit for."

By comparison with the ordinary British maiden, Jenny was rather an *esprit fort.* The rector and she had had many a good-natured assault of arms together upon theological matters; he attired in full armour of orthodoxy, and riding on the high horse of ecclesiastical supremacy; and she, as it were, clothed but in buff jerkin of common-sense, and armed with the bow of sense of justice, and the shafts of native humour. When he came thundering down upon her with the lance of authority, she would step lightly aside, and sometimes send an arrow through the joints of his harness, that went home. To do him justice, he had been always ready for the combat—perhaps it was the best chance he had of getting her to talk with him alone—while she did but stand on her defence; but on the present occasion, their respective tactics seemed reversed: she had offered him battle by throwing down that gage of

the book of Nature, and yet he did not pick it up.

"This scene is a fair leaf of it, indeed," said he; "and yet, how the place is marred by those who haunt it!"

"Thank you, sir." This acknowledgment was accompanied by an elaborate courtesy.

"My dear Miss Alice, you surely cannot think that I was referring to yourself?"

"I didn't know," answered she demurely. "When I have heard you say: 'There all was peace and beauty,' &c., it has been generally followed by a reference to the presence of the infidel."

"Don't talk so lightly, Alice. I should be distressed and pained, indeed, did I think *you* were deserving of such a name. What I had in my mind was the unfortunate association of this place—the set of people whose business necessarily brings them hither, with their brutal manners, and still more shocking language."

"Do you mean the boating gentlemen, or the bargees?"

The simplicity of the tone of this inquiry would have made the fortune of a comic actress. Jenny knew well enough that Mr. Glyddon meant the bargees, but also that he was very jealous of the gentlemen rowers, whose toast she was, in spite of herself, though they were seldom vouchsafed a sight of her; and indeed the very mention of them irritated him.

"The bargees, of course," said he. "It makes me shudder to think of your being obliged to listen to them."

"One is obliged to listen to many things, Mr. Glyddon, to which one would willingly shut one's ears," answered she significantly. "But as for their bad language—which my friend the lasher here, however, is so good as to drown—that is not half so bad, to my mind, as seeing them beat their horses. When a man blasphemes his Creator, he does not do it with impunity, I suppose, and the Maker of all things is far beyond

the reach of his ill-humours ; but the poor horse is not. For my part, I have a firm belief that words—for ill as well as for good—have not the weight of deeds."

"It is the intention, however, my good girl, that makes the sin," observed the rector, mounting his ecclesiastical steed, in spite of his determination not to do so. "If it were a man's intention to ill-treat his horse, even though something should occur to prevent him, he would be as culpable as if he had done it."

"It would not be so bad for the horse, however," observed Jenny slily. "Now, suppose (for one may suppose anything) the bargee intended to go to church, and then thought better of it (I beg pardon—worse of it), would it be equally creditable to him as though he had actually gone ?"

"My good girl, you know better than that. Everybody knows that 'hell is paved with good intentions.'"

"Who told you that ? Is it in the Bible ? If not, why are you clergymen so fond of

quoting it? You seem to me to take a positive pleasure—I mean many of you do so—in narrowing the way, and closing the gate against miserable sinners. If a bad intention unfulfilled is as bad as a bad act, a good intention unfulfilled ought to be worth something, surely."

The rector moved uneasily on his theological steed. This shaft had found its way, if not to some vital portion of his frame, to a more or less tender one. Before he could seat himself in the saddle again to his complete satisfaction, Jenny let fly another arrow.

"You are good people, you clergymen—much better than most of us, I grant—but you are not ingenuous. You will concede nothing to your adversaries; you don't know how to give up with a good grace a position that has been shown to be untenable. Why don't you own at once that sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander?"

"Because it isn't," rejoined the rector

sharply. "Take that very proverb, for instance, in its literal sense: 'What is right for the woman is right for the man.' That is not the case."

"But it ought to be, Mr. Glyddon."

"You know you cannot maintain *that* position, my good girl. Men and women are *not* equal; they were not made so from the first. Nature herself would teach us that, even if we had not the Scriptures. Read the earliest record of human life that we possess—the Old Testament——"

"Yes; I know very well that women are only spoken of there as gleaners or pitcher-carriers. But it was only men who wrote that account of them."

"Inspired men, however," said the rector gravely.

"It is a pity," answered Jenny with irritation, "that there were no inspired women."

The thought of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, passed across the rector's mind, but he dismissed it, as being scarcely apposite to the argument.

"You are fighting against nature and religion together," said he. "The world accepts the inequality of the sexes as decisively as the Church; I have been reading Her words this very day upon that subject."

This was the first reference that had been made by either Jenny or the rector to the ceremony which he had performed that morning in town; and yet it had been filling—though with very different feelings—the thoughts of both of them. Not even when Arthur had come down to Swansdale an engaged man, did the rector feel sure that something might not happen to break off the match. It might have been possible for a man (though he would not himself have thought so) to forget Alice Renn during long years of absence; but even one who had so forgotten her could scarce be proof against her surpassing charms when his eyes once more beheld them. Although, therefore, the rector could not but blame Arthur's conduct with respect to Jenny, it

did not seem to him, in the face of such great temptation, wholly inexcusable. He knew that she loved her old flame still, and that while he was attainable—was within the possibility of becoming hers—there had been no hope for himself in that quarter; but now—now that his friend had given her up once for all, and married another woman—there would surely be more chance for *him*—the great reward for his long and patient waiting would fall into his loving arms at last. For he had loved Jenny from the first, even though he knew there had been some tender passages between Tyndall and herself, and had hoped in his secret heart for the very thing that had actually come to pass—namely, that absence would cool the passion of one or the other of them. And even when he heard that it had done so in Arthur's case, though chivalry towards his friend no longer kept him silent, as it had hitherto done, he had kept silence still. For though suspense is hard to bear, it is not, after all, so hard as

that rough shock of disappointment and refusal which he had only too good reason to fear would be his fate if he asked Jenny for her love while Arthur was unmarried. "The fair field" was at last his own, but (alas !), as it seemed, "no favour." Rather than even now hear him speak upon the subject next his heart, she met him with arguments and contradictions which seemed more woful, because more out of place than ever. He would fain have agreed with her upon every topic, had his conscience permitted him to do so, and through sweet accord, have led her tenderly to the consideration of his suit.

Of course, there were circumstances in Jenny's case which caused her to hold a different position towards himself than might have been expected, considering their relations in life. He was the rector of the parish, and so far a man of some importance and dignity, while she was but a lock-keeper's daughter; but this disparity was apparent rather than real, for old

Jacob Renn was reported to be rich, and had been known in Swansdale as a man of substance for near half a century, while Jenny's independence did not consist in means alone, but in character. She had helped the rector with his schools and choir, and did so even yet; but out of the schoolroom and the church she held her own opinions, and expressed them with freedom. He had set himself to convert this beautiful heretic, but not at present with any decisive success. Their ages were about the same; and if he were her superior in learning, she, on the other hand, was gifted with better wits, and even with an originality of mind most unusual with one of her sex and position; and now he felt himself less able than ever to contend with her, with that traitor in his own camp, his heart, urging him to dismount from his ecclesiastical steed, and fling away shield and spear, and throw himself on his knees at her dainty feet. He was a kindly Christian gentleman, bent on doing good—

though somewhat obstinate in doing it after a particular fashion—singularly free from taint of grossness, and with an honest contempt for the airs and ways of gallantry; but at this moment he would perhaps have bartered some of his solid virtues for the possession of handsome features, a graceful form, and the art of expressing fitly the tender feelings within him. He knew that his face was plain, his shape ungainly, his manners stiff and formal, and, in his humility, thought such drawbacks to be even greater defects in woman's eyes than they really are.

Even when he had got to speak of the ceremony that he had solemnised that morning, he lacked the address to turn the opportunity to his own account; nay, on the contrary, its approximation to the matter he would have spoken of so terrified him, that in place of pursuing the subject, he flew off at a tangent. "If you want to see the place of women in society accurately defined, Miss Alice," said he, "you should

read Dr. Straitlace on *The Handmaidens of the Church.*"

"Perhaps I may," said Jenny; "but I remember Miss Blanche telling me that Dr. Straitlace was almost a papist."

"He is a most wise and excellent man, my good girl," returned Mr. Glyddon hotly, for he was himself accused of leanings towards the scarlet woman, "whatever foolish people may choose to say of him."

Now, Jenny detested to be "my-good-girled" by the rector or anybody else, justly conceiving that that form of words implied intellectual patronage and condescension, and she did not like her friend Miss Blanche to be called foolish. "Well, I'll read it," said she humbly, "since you think so highly of him, Mr. Glyddon. He was the same gentleman, if I remember right, who distinguished himself so highly at Oxford by advocating the Celibacy of the Clergy." Jenny was very miserable on her own account, which must be her excuse for a retort so cruel, and directly she

had spoken she would have given much to have recalled her words. She had undoubtedly intended them to bear a certain significance. On his first coming into the parish, as a very young man, enamoured of Puseyism, but ignorant of Jenny, Mr. Glyddon had himself advocated the Celibacy of the Clergy as well as all other points of the High-church charter; but she was well aware that the extreme solicitude exhibited by this excellent theologian for her conversion to his ritualistic views had been of late years mingled with a more tender feeling, the idea of which was to-day, of all days, especially unwelcome to her. She wished, once for all, to cure him of his wound, but had she known how deep and tender it was, she would not have used such ungentle surgery. Just as though this blow had been a material one, dealt in his face, the colour rose upon the rector's high cheek-bones, and his honest eyes grew moist with tears.

"You are angry with me, Alice," said

he in a plaintive voice. "Forgive me, if I have annoyed you."

"I am angry with myself, Mr. Glyddon, for being angry on such small occasion," answered Jenny earnestly, "and I should say rather, 'Forgive *me*.'"

"You would have me forget *you*," he blurted out, with sorrowful pathos. "Yes; you would say: 'Forgive, and then *Forget*.' I read it in your eyes."

She did not answer him, for she could say nothing that could please or comfort him; but she pitied him from her soul. Her silence and her pity gave him courage at last to ask what his heart nevertheless foreboded would be denied.

"Dear Alice, I have loved you for many a year," sighed he, "when you have never dreamed of it; but now I see you know it. Take pity upon me.—You do so? Well, and pity is akin to love, they say."

She shook her head, but suffered him to retain the hand he had seized, though it lay in his own without response.

"I know, Alice, you have not the love to give that you once gave to another"—he could feel that little hand growing cold and heavy in his hold, as lead, yet he went on—"but I am content with less, far less. Even if you do not love me at all, I can wait in hope. In time, perhaps—now you know how I hope and pray for it—you may learn to do so—just a little."

"I respect and like you very, very much, Mr. Glyddon," said she gravely; "but you ask me for what I have not to give. You cannot raise the dead, and my love is dead, and—— Listen! that is its knell!"

The merry marriage-peal was still filling the trembling air above them, and for a full minute they both listened to it, while it wailed out, "My love is dead," "My love is dead," "My love is dead," before either spoke again.

Then, "I know that well," said the rector softly; "it was cruel of me to speak to you like this upon the very day it died: a week hence, a month, a year, I will ask you once

again, Alice, and even then I will not expect too much."

"Mr. Glyddon, it is no use," said Jenny, "nor will it ever be. It may be different with other girls—and better girls than I—but as for me, I can love but once."

"But you cannot love Arthur Tyndall *now*," reasoned the poor rector, "for that would be sinful."

"Can I not?" she answered with a strange, sad smile. "You talk of love, sir, but you know not what it is. There is, however, no need to argue upon that matter, since one thing is certain—if I may not love him, I *cannot* love another. What! are you still not answered? Well, then, years ago I made a vow—Heaven was my witness, though you are the first man to know it—that I would never marry any but Arthur. You would not have me forswear myself, I know."

So she thought, and so would he have thought, an hour ago; but the good rector was, after all, but human. As the existence

of buried Herculaneum was not dreamed of for centuries, and would never have been discovered but for the sinking of a well, so there is many a man who goes through life without any necessity arising for the revelation of his inmost feelings. The lava-mud of conventionalism is sometimes very deep and hard, but under it all lies human nature. Ritualism—like many another "ism" and "opathy"—is excellent and all-sufficient when there is nothing much the matter; but, like thin ice with a weight too great for it, it breaks down when the pressure is serious. The rector found himself face to face, for the first time, not only with the declared object of his affections, but *with himself*, and if he had had time to contemplate his own features thus disclosed, he would scarcely have recognised them.

"Such a vow as you speak of, dearest Alice, is nought," cried he, impetuously; "or if it be aught, it is better broken. What right had you to devote your whole life and being to any human creature, as

though he were something sacred, in place of the faithless man that his conduct has proved him to be? Why is he, because he has played *you* false, to make *my* life also miserable and lonesome? Do you suppose, because I do my duty in the station to which I have been called, and am not at the bidding of every reckless impulse, that I cannot love—that, like the blessed martyrs of old, I walk about in the burning fiery furnace of passion unconsumed? I tell you, no! I love you, I adore you, I worship you, as much, nay, Heaven forgive me! *more* than man should worship woman!"

He would have thrown himself on his knees before her, as if to a veritable patron saint, had she not stopped him.

"Do not abase yourself, Mr. Glyddon; do not do what you will be ashamed to think of in your calmer moments," cried she, with tender earnestness. "I pity you; I respect you; I am sorry, beyond the power of words to tell, to pain you thus;

but it is better for you to know the truth, however bitter, than to encourage a baseless hope. I will never marry you, nor any man."

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE INFANT.

ON their honeymoon in the Lake Country, Arthur and Helen were as happy as the days were long; and the wet days, with which that beautiful region is so plentifully dowered, *were* long. On the fine ones there was always a hill to be climbed, from which four-and-twenty distinct sheets of water were to be seen; or a row on the lake to be taken to some point, from which four-and-twenty distinct hills could be counted; but when the sheets of water came down perpendicularly and hid the

hills, it became a little dull within doors. Our ancestors seem to have had a great liking for inns, and that, too, when no modern improvements in the way of *table-d'hôtes* and croquet-grounds made inn-life social; but why they should have done so is a mystery. They drank a good deal, it is true, and perhaps the reflection, that they were stopping at a place where no remonstrance was likely to be made upon the amount of liquor they imbibed, was grateful to them; else, there is certainly an atmosphere of discomfort about even the best regulated hotels, that causes, if not discontent, at least restlessness and ennui. To be confined to the coffee-room, or even to the public reading-room (when there is one), for a whole day is a melancholy experience; and even if you have with you your own materials for business or amusement, you cannot use them there effectually.

Of course, our bride and bridegroom had a bower of their own to sit in, where they could be "all in all to one another;" but

even there, a day-long down-pour produced depressing effects. Helen would sometimes send forth her Arthur, like the dove of old, to see whether the waters were subsiding; or if they were obviously not doing so, suggest to him that he should take a walk without her, since she was sure he must be getting ennuyed, shut up alone with her all day. And though he gallantly denied that (as he was expected to do), he took his walk, not wholly without a sense of emancipation. Or sometimes she would say, good-naturedly, "Why not have a game at billiards, darling?" and he would go into the hotel pool-room, and stay there for several games; and it was curious how much more quickly the time passed there than it did in their private parlour. But this, perhaps, if the truth were told, is the history of all honeymoons, more or less. However it may be with woman, man cannot live on sugar-plums for a whole month without occasionally getting a little tired of them. The couples who earn that flitch of

bacon at Dunmow yearly must be of angelic tempers, or else (and which is more consonant with human experience) great fibbers; for they make oath that they have never had so much as "a tiff," "a breeze," "a squabble"—the very number of synonyms for the thing show how universally prevalent it is. That the quarrels of lovers are the renewings of love, we learn even from the Latin grammar; and if there is no quarrel, how is love to be renewed? "Tiffs" are the very salt of the ocean of love, without which it would "go bad," as the housekeepers say—become utterly flat and insipid. A man of sense likes his wife (so to speak) to have a kick in her, and *vice versâ;* and unless this is the case, men are but tyrants, and women termagants. If any fault could be found in the relations between Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Tyndall on their wedding tour, it was that they were too loving a couple. For Helen worshipped Arthur, and Arthur did his best to prove that he worshipped Helen—nor is it to be

supposed that he did not like her very much indeed, because he liked another better. To do him justice, he did not think of that other more than he could possibly help. When the idea obtruded itself, as it sometimes would ("Ah, if it were but Jenny!"), he put it from him with a sense of shame, and was doubly attentive to his wife, by way of penance. Then, if only tolerably happy himself, he made Helen perfectly so; walking beside her pony as she rode up Skiddaw, and stopping it whenever the view struck him as most favourable to point out to her Glaramara or Scafell; or making her toil a pleasure in some less ambitious ramble on foot, by the aid of his strong arm and tender guidance. They had no "tiffs," it was true, at present; but that was his fault. Helen was sometimes not disinclined for them—her nature, indeed, like that of many other excellent women, was tiffy; but he would never take up the quarrel, however temptingly it was offered for his acceptance.

This was not, as all married people are aware, a healthy state of things. When a man is henpecked, there is generally a pretty good reason for it, which is not to his credit; and similarly, though in a less degree, it is a bad sign if he doesn't take his own part, when attacked by his wife without reason. Helen didn't hurt him much, it is true; she didn't bite him, but she nibbled at him, and he did not resent it. It was enough to make any woman have her suspicions. Fortunately for her own peace of mind, they never hit upon the real explanation, which was (I think) that Arthur felt he had no devotion to spare—no reserve fund of affection upon which he could draw in case of having any heavy balance to make up in the way of discontent and annoyance. If the waiters and the chambermaids in the Lake Country had been asked their opinion upon the subject—and they have a great experience of newly married folk—they would have described Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Tyndall as

"a fond pair," but have added their doubts of "its lasting." The bridegroom was "too much of a lamb," and did not "assert hisself" sufficiently.

The first time that Arthur shewed a determination to have his own way was upon the question of the duration of their tour. He wished it to be prolonged for some days or weeks (in fact, indefinitely); while his wife wanted to go home—to Swansdale. Natural scenery had no great charms for her, and though she enjoyed the lakes immensely with her darling Arthur, she would have enjoyed Lincolnshire equally well under the same circumstances; she was tired of rambling and scrambling; and it was growing late in the season. Above all, she was eager to assume her station as the great lady at Swansdale. Here, in the Lake Country, she was a bride indeed, and as such, a focus of considerable interest; but there were half-a-dozen brides besides herself, who were focuses also. At Swansdale she would be *the* bride; in her

honour calls would be paid "by the county," dinner-parties given, bells set ringing, gravel-paths strewed with flowers; in fact, a great fuss about her, such as is dear to the female heart, would probably be made, and she was impatient for it.

Arthur, on the other hand, dreaded the return home. It seemed to him haunted by Jenny's presence. If she had been dead, and he had wronged her, his conscience could scarcely have smitten him more keenly. The Hall would be a prison to him, for how could he ever leave it, by land or water, secure from meeting her! He would see her (as he had already pictured her) in the organ-loft at church, and come face to face with her in the porch, perhaps, when the service was over. Once out of the Hall grounds, neither path nor stream would be safe from her. Would they meet, for the first time, alone, or in company; and if the latter, would he be with his Helen? And would Jenny speak or not, and what would she say? For her

own sake, as well as for his, he wished that she lived miles away from Swansdale. He was resolute never to revive in her, by word or look, the embers of that love that was supposed to have died out between them. Of course, if it had been really dead, he would have had no fear of revivifying it. He knew, in his own case, that it was alive—smouldering, glowing deep within him—and only kept from bursting forth in flame by the united efforts of several moral fire-engines. Prudence, Gratitude, and Right Feeling pumped cold water upon it at the least sign of danger, and kept it under for the present; but they could not put it out. They worked hard, however, to do so. Arthur Tyndall had really done his best to remedy the consequences of his own faithlessness and folly. He had been prepared, on that morning when he stood alone in the summer-house, to take upon himself all the consequences of his own bad behaviour; he had made up his mind to abjure ease and station, and

to go forth from his native land, alone and poor, in order to discharge by toil what he considered to be a just obligation. In the end, perhaps, he had flattered himself that he might win Jenny also; but this expectation was so exceedingly remote, that it scarcely sweetened the bitter cup he had resolved to drain to the dregs. Then came Helen, as we have seen, and won him back again to herself, chiefly by her self-sacrificing generosity, partly by the passionate devotion which it so evidently evinced.

Having given way to her fond arguments, to which he had not had the courage to oppose the truth, was it possible for him, when, thanks to Jack, he found himself a free man, to turn upon Helen, and reject her for the second time upon a ground that he had not mentioned on the first occasion? At all events, he had not had "the heart"—the courage, or the brutality—to do so; and he was now a married man. As respected his position as Helen's husband, it is true he had as yet, even in thought,

little to reproach himself with; but he feared the temptations that the future might have in store for him. He remembered that meeting on the little bridge with Jenny —her tears and her agony. He knew she loved him then, and feared—what, if he had been a scoundrel, he would have hoped —that she loved him *still.* He was neither so vain nor so base as to anticipate any positive harm to Jenny from his presence at Swansdale; but he felt that it would be bad for her, and bad—or at least embarrassing and inconvenient—for him. Hence it was that he opposed Helen's wish to return home.

"Let us go to London for a week or two first," suggested he—a temporary reprieve at best; but procrastination seemed always better to Arthur Tyndall than the grappling with a difficulty face to face, and getting it over. "Let us go to London, dear, and enjoy ourselves a bit, before shutting ourselves up at Swansdale."

"Ah, you dread shutting yourself up

with me alone, Arthur!" was Helen's quick rejoinder. "You have had enough of my society, I suppose, and require some relief from it, before you can undergo it at home for good; just as people take their children to the sea-side in autumn to give them strength to bear the winter!"

"Really, my dear Helen, I think you have no reason to say that. I am sure I've"—— Here he stopped, but not quite in time.

"'Been very attentive to me,' you were going to say; or, 'borne everything very patiently, all this time.'"

"Indeed, I was not, Helen. You put words into my mouth. The fact is, this is just the dampest time of the year at the river-side; and you are far from strong, you know, my darling, though you are so plucky, and never own to anything being the matter."

Helen had one duodecimo ringlet, a mere curling thread of softest silk, that hung down beside her delicate ear, and with this

he toyed affectionately as he spoke. Unable as man is to cope with woman, and especially when she is his wife, nature gives to what is paradoxically termed "the sterner sex" some little arts that serve to mitigate female tyranny; and when Arthur could capture this curl, Helen always became mollified.

"But, my dear Arthur," said she, smiling, "that loving argument of yours—which is, however, founded upon a mistake, for I am quite strong—would have equal force to keep me away from Swansdale for months to come."

"Well, for some time, certainly, my dear."

"Oh, but that's nonsense! We will stop in town, if you like, for a few days on our way home, but home we must go. So far from its doing me harm, I feel it will do me good. I am quite pining for Swansdale."

Arthur sighed, but submitted. How could he do otherwise, since he had, in fact, no arguments with which to support his

position. Helen, however, was so pleased with him for his prompt capitulation—for she had the sagacity to perceive that it was no mere whim that he had thus given up—that she made up her mind to reward him by letting him invite a bachelor friend or two from town to shoot with him at home.

When they did go to town, and Arthur expressed no wish to do this, she took it as a sign that he was content with her society, and out of gratitude to him, asked Mr. Allardyce herself to Swansdale, expecting to give her husband a joyful surprise. So far from being joyfully surprised, he was considerably annoyed by this, for several reasons. In the first place, it was treating him like a child; or, rather, it was treating him as though he was not master in his own house, a very unpleasant notion to a poor man who has married an heiress: in the second, because his regard for Allardyce was less real than apparent. He stuck to him loyally, because others looked askance at him, as he believed,

without cause; but now that he played cards no longer, there was, in fact, scarcely anything in common between them. He still, however, professed a considerable regard for "Lardy," which, backed by the influence of the herb valerian, had induced Helen to invite the man: and when she had done so, he could scarcely cancel his wife's act. If she had asked Adair, he would have forgiven her easily enough, though it was doubtful whether Jack could have come, for though the long vacation was not yet over, he was understood to be working hard in his chambers, not so much, perhaps, with the wool-sack in view, as the possession of a certain prize in petticoats, whose name may be guessed.

But Helen had *not* asked Jack, nor shown herself so kindly towards him as she might have done, as her husband's oldest friend; and now Jack would doubtless be annoyed, not, indeed, that he had been slighted—for his nature was too magnanimous to harbour "littlenesses" of that sort—but that the

man of whom he entertained so ill an opinion should be asked to Arthur's home. It was true that Arthur did not share that opinion; but he would certainly not have wished to act in the teeth of it, as this invitation made him appear to do. He clung to Jack more than ever now, and would have liked to have had *him* at Swansdale beyond everything; but, as we have said, the young barrister's studies forbade it, and also the invitation might have been declined on other grounds. Though Adair was incapable of petty feelings, he had sensibility enough to perceive that his presence was not welcome to his friend's wife; and if he had been less modest, or more acquainted with female character, he would have known the reason of it—namely, that, though she knew his influence over her husband was never used except for good, she was jealous of him.

As it was, it was impossible for him to press his society upon the newly married pair; and Arthur, in resentment at the

necessity which kept Jack at a distance, did a thing which was dreadful in Helen's eyes —he left her alone occasionally, and dined with him at the club. It is due to Jack—whose character, though he might never become a judge, was eminently judicious—to say that these proposals emanated from Arthur. Jack foresaw that they would only increase the disfavour with which Mrs. Tyndall regarded him, and yet he could hardly refuse to meet his friend, without stating the cause of his disinclination to do so, which would have been ill-judged indeed. He could not, as a bachelor, suggest to his married friend that he ought not to leave his wife—if it might be done in some cases, Arthur at least was the last man in the world to take such advice—and, moreover, it was unnecessary, since his wife was sure to let him know as much. These meetings themselves had not the flavour of the old times. All subjects had then been open for their discussion, if not for their agreement. Now, there were no less than three

which were tacitly avoided as topics of conversation — Jenny, Helen, and Allardyce. Moreover, the idea that when the evening was over, he would be called to account for the manner in which he had spent it, or, what was worse, would be subjected to sideway reflections—"flings"—from his neglected bride, leavened the whole entertainment for Arthur. "Small matters, indeed," it may be said, "to harass an existence which could boast of so many blessings." But, unhappily, such existences are easily harassed; and it is by such small specks that the "white radiance" of married life becomes blurred and blackened.

It is not to be supposed, however, even when Arthur found himself seated in the train for Swansdale, next his wife, and opposite to the unwelcome Allardyce, that he wished himself unmarried. When matters have come to *that* pass—when a man or woman allow even to themselves, "I have made a mistake in my marriage," the position is serious indeed. No; beset by mis-

givings as he was with respect to Jenny, and annoyed to find himself hampered for an indefinite time with a not very congenial companion in his whilom friend, Arthur was not so disloyal to his recent vows as to wish himself a free man again. His disagreements with his wife—for they were more serious than "tiffs," and had no such healthy influence—were, after all, only occasional, nor was he unconscious that her excessive devotion to himself lay at the bottom of them. When Helen had ceased to be a bride, and become a wife, she would grow more sensible and less exacting; doubtless, they would get on "all right together when once they were at home." It must be remembered that Helen had youth and beauty on her side, two powerful allies.

There was one advantage in "that fellow Allardyce"—so far had "Lardy" already dropped in the thermometer of friendship—being with them: there was no occasion

for him (Arthur) to make conversation; and it was a relief to him, while appearing to listen to that of his wife and friend, to be left alone with his own thoughts. Especially was this the case when the scenery began to grow familiar to his eyes, and suggestive of the past. When they reached the station, from which they had still a few miles to drive, there was Uncle Magus on the platform to greet them; farther on, there was a more public welcome in the shape of a triumphal arch, and a crowd of male and female notables of the village, headed by the rector, who made the happy pair the subject of a pleasant speech.

Helen was delighted by these manifestations of the general goodwill, and bowed to left and right, after the pattern of Her Gracious Majesty when acknowledging the plaudits of her subjects. Mr. Allardyce, if slightly bored, was cynically amused; and Arthur thought it "deuced kind of everybody," and in more polite phrase expressed

himself to that effect. Only he looked about him a little nervously, lest his eye should light on Jenny. She was not likely to be present on such an occasion from choice, but she might be so from fear of her absence being misconstrued. At the lodge gates, where they left the carriage, the village school children were assembled, and sang a song composed by some local poet for the occasion. If the words were not of great merit, the sentiments they expressed were very kindly, and Helen was deeply touched by them.

"Who taught you to sing so prettily, my little dear?" inquired she of one chubby-faced little girl, the smallest of the infant choir.

"Jenny Wren, ma'am; leastways, not this song, she didn't, but she do most songs."

"Jenny Wren!" returned Helen, smiling. "Well, if it had been 'Thrush,' or 'Blackbird,' I should have understood it better. *Who* is this Jenny Wren?"

"It's Miss Wren, please, ma'am, as lives at the lock."

"Oh, *Miss* Wren, is it?" said Helen, laughing.—"That is the young woman, is it not, Arthur," inquired she, innocently, "that Mrs. Ralph Tyndall spoke of, when we were on the river?"

"Very likely," returned Arthur, carelessly.

"And why didn't Jenny Wren teach you this pretty song, my child, since she taught you the others?" continued Helen, pursuing her cross-examination of the infant. The publicity of the scene, and the prominent part accorded to her in it, flattered her sense of self-importance and "position:" she was eager to play that *rôle* of "Lady Bountiful," for which, to say truth, she was not quite fitted. It was a pity, at all events, that she began with the juvenile population. She had no experience of children, or, looking at the flushed and embarrassed little countenance that now looked up at her, she would not have

pushed her researches in the present case to extremity.

"Come, why didn't Miss Wren, who lives at the lock, teach you this song as well as the others?"

"I'd rather not say," said the little dot, growing very red indeed.

"Oh, indeed," answered Helen; "then we won't ask. I should be sorry, just on the first day of my coming home, to hear anything wrong of Jenny Wren or of anybody."

This magnificent moral patronage flew over the head of her little friend altogether.

"There's nothing wrong with Jenny," replied she, sturdily.

"Then, if there was nothing wrong, I'll give you this silver sixpence for an answer to my question."

She held up the glittering prize in her gloved fingers.

"Well, then, I *did* hear mother say," said the little girl, standing on tiptoe for

this reward of truth and plain-speaking, "that it wasn't likely as Jenny would teach a song to welcome you, when she thought to have been in your place herself!"

CHAPTER VI.

WITH THE RECTOR.

THE words of the *enfant terrible*, delivered as they were in haste, in view of the promised guerdon, and in a thin bass voice, were heard only by those immediately about her —who fortunately happened to be the four "gentlefolks." Helen had the presence of mind to bestow the sixpence, and to say: "Oh, that was it, was it?" in unembarrassed tones, and then passed on. The child, dazzled by her treasure, thought no more of the words that had procured it, and the public scandal was thereby averted that

would certainly have taken place had she repeated them.

As Helen crossed the threshold of the Hall, Arthur took her hand, and said: "Welcome home, Helen." He would have kissed her, but there was something in her look which repelled and likewise irritated him. He knew what she was annoyed about, of course, but what right had she to be annoyed? Could she suppose that he had kept his affections free for her, even before he had had the opportunity of seeing her? As she did not return the pressure of his hand, he withdrew it, and turned away to acknowledge the good wishes of the servants, most of whom had known him from his youth. He did not see Allardyce step forward in his place, and congratulate her upon the public welcome which she had received. There was a tenderness in his tone which seemed rather to sympathise with misfortune than with triumph, and which brought the colour into her cheek. *He* had heard it, then.

He knew that there was a girl in the village who had thought to have held her place—to have been her Arthur's wife.

"I shall reserve my home-welcome till you come to see me at the cottage, my dear," said Uncle Magus. "I hope you and Arthur will not be so wrapped up in one another—though I own it would be pardonable in his case—as to forget the existence of a lone old fellow like myself."

He too had heard it, then, and was doing his best to knit up the ravelled sleeve of her disquiet. She was grateful to him for that, though chagrined to discover in him another witness to her humiliation, and she thanked him warmly. Then Mr. Glyddon came in to say a few gracious words in his private capacity as friend of the family: his felicitations were genuine enough; it was clear he had heard nothing, without doors, to mar the effect of their reception. Perhaps it was mere gratitude to him for this that induced Helen to ask him to dinner; but it was not long before she

formed the resolution to turn the rector's presence to account in the matter that now monopolised her mind, should an opportunity arise for doing so. And such an opportunity did arise. Soon after dinner, Arthur proposed an adjournment to the billiard-room, to which Allardyce and Uncle Magus agreed—the last not without some notion of protecting his nephew from his companion's artifices; for it was not without difficulty that the old gentleman had been convinced by Arthur's arguments that the heir-presumptive of Lord Catamaran was innocent even of actual collusion in that rascality of Paul Jones, while he mistrusted and disliked him exceedingly. He volunteered, therefore, to "stand and mark" for the two young men; while Mr. Glyddon, good, respectable soul, repaired to the drawing-room, to keep Helen company.

She looked up from her seat by the fire—for though it was early to take out the polished bars of the grate, prudent Mrs. Glyn, the housekeeper, had done so, and

had had the fire lit, lest her new mistress should "feel the damp" of Swansdale—and pleased to see the rector was not followed by any of the other gentlemen, Helen made room for him beside her.

"I am glad you are come, Mr. Glyddon," said she, in her clear tones—so swift and clear that to some ears they sounded almost sharp—"for I wish to have a word with you alone."

"Indeed," said the rector, smiling; "then I am fortunate in having resisted the temptations of the billiard-table." What Mrs. Tyndall had to say to him he concluded must be with reference to that subject which, to do him justice, was seldom absent from his thoughts—the parish.

It was a source of genuine congratulation to him that Arthur had married a woman who held proper views as respected church matters. It would have placed him in an unpleasant position had the wife of his squire and patron been careless on such points, and still worse had she been a zealot

of the Exeter Hall type. But as it was, he looked for her sympathy and co-operation. It was not improbable that she now wished to signalise her arrival at Swansdale by some suitable thank-offering — a painted window for the chancel, or a brazen lectern, or even an altar-cloth worked in gold, any or all of which would have been very acceptable. If she should leave the choice to him, he had made up his mind—for, though modest on his own account, there were no bounds to his voracity on behalf of Mother Church—to ask for a new organ. Curiously enough, Helen's first words did have some sort of reference to that very subject, and yet, if she had proposed to turn Uncle Magus' cottage into a Methodist chapel, they could not have astonished him more.

"Tell me, Mr. Glyddon, who is this Jenny Wren?"

The poor rector felt himself turn hot and cold in the same instant, like the Russian gentlemen who, travellers tell us, enjoy nothing so much as exchanging a vapour-bath

for a roll in the snow; with this difference only, that he did *not* enjoy it—he had never felt so uncomfortable before. He was incapable of deception, but it was certainly not with perfect ingenuousness that he replied—"Jenny Wren? Do you mean Miss Alice Renn, the organist?"

"I suppose so," returned Mrs. Tyndall, dryly; "though why it should be the fashion here to call her 'Miss,' I cannot tell. She is the daughter of the man at the lock, is she not?"

"Of old Jacob Renn? Yes. He did not always have the lock, however; he used to keep the *Welcome*."

"So I have heard. But is an innkeeper's daughter considered a lady in these parts? Don't deceive me, Mr. Glyddon." (Her clear voice was sharp now, without doubt.) "I wish to hear the truth about this girl. It is better I should hear it from your lips than from some common person in the village; for the story, it seems, is in everybody's mouth."

"What story, Mrs. Tyndall?"

"You know what story very well—the story of my husband and this girl. You are the clergyman of the place, and a gentleman; I appeal to you in both capacities. I was told to-day, in all innocence, by a mere child, that this Alice Renn thought to have been Arthur's wife. I want to know how I stand here, and whom I have ousted."

"My dear Mrs. Tyndall, you have ousted nobody. It is quite true that, years and years ago, when Arthur was quite a boy, there was some little—" The rector felt that to hesitate was to be lost, and yet he could not find the word he wished.

"There was some disgraceful attachment formed between them, I conclude," said Helen, coldly.

"Your conclusion is itself disgraceful, madam," cried the rector, jumping from his seat; "there was nothing of the sort. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Tyndall, but the girl I spoke of has been my parishioner

these six years, and has been a great help to me, and—and to the church, and an excellent example to all our young women. Not a shadow of reproach has ever rested upon her character."

"Indeed," said Helen, even more coldly than before. She was by no means pleased to be told that Miss Alice Renn was so irreproachable. It is no comfort to a woman who imagines she has a rival to hear that the said rival is everything a parish priest could wish. She would, perhaps, even prefer to hear that she was no better than she should be. "You will assure me next, perhaps, Mr. Glyddon, that this *Miss* Alice Renn is not only a paragon of virtue, but also a highly-educated and lady-like young woman?"

"Without intending to do so, madam," answered the rector, quietly, "you have exactly described her character. Her education, it is true, she owes only to herself, but she has read and learned more than falls to the lot of most women; while if

ever the expression, 'a lady born,' could be rightfully applied to anyone, it especially befits her."

"And how was it, then, that this piece of perfection—this highly-educated young woman who has never been to school—this innkeeper's daughter who might be taken for a duchess, and who favoured my husband with her modest smiles when he was a boy, was never married to him?"

"If you insist upon having my opinion, Mrs. Tyndall," said the rector, bluntly—he was no longer embarrassed now, nor did he feel any need to pick and choose for words —"it was through his own ill-behaviour. They were never engaged, as I understand; no promise ever passed between them; but he made her feel that she had won his heart. Yet when he went abroad, he never wrote to her, never thought of her, or, if he did so, to little purpose, since he so utterly forgot her that, on his return to England, he never so much as asked whether she was alive or dead. I am sorry to speak so

harshly of your husband, Mrs. Tyndall—a man I have reason, on all other accounts, to respect and like, and to whom I am greatly indebted—but since you compel me to do so, I must needs tell the truth."

He need not have apologised so earnestly, for every word that he had said to her husband's discredit was welcome to Helen. It was a comfort to her to reflect, if Arthur had misunderstood their relative positions so far as to flirt with this innkeeper's daughter in his youth, that riper years had at least brought with them a better sense of the fitness of things : that he had endeavoured to forget her, and succeeded. Upon the whole, her inquiries had ended more satisfactorily than they had at one time promised to do ; but there was one thing yet that troubled her.

" I understand you to say, Mr. Glyddon, that Arthur never communicated with this young person while abroad, nor revisited her when he returned to England ? The first time he saw her, therefore, after that,

must have been when we passed through Swansdale Lock in the barge ?"

"I suppose so, madam—in fact I am sure of it."

Helen was calling to mind how long that interview had lasted ; how they had waited for Arthur by the river-bank ; how Mr. Adair had hastened to excuse him for his delay by a ridiculous story about "shandy-gaff"—just such a one as a confidential soubrette on the stage would invent to account for her young mistress's peccadilloes ; and how Mrs. Ralph Tyndall had disdained that subterfuge, and confessed at once that Jenny and Arthur had been "very old friends." And then came the recollection of his disinclination to row up to the lock that night, doubtless for fear of seeing this girl. Why had he spoken to her at all ? Why should he be afraid of seeing her ? Was it possible that the sight of her had resuscitated his former passion, and made him distrustful of himself ? The flame of suspicion thus kindled in Helen's

heart leaped from point to point with terrible rapidity. He had sworn, it is true, on that same night that he had never loved another as he then loved *her;* but perhaps he had loved another *better.* There were no bounds to the deceit of man. Even the clergy themselves—*her* clergy—were accused of "mental reservation." What if Arthur had married her for her money, while in his secret soul he preferred another? Her heart became ice, her brain grew hot and dazed. What was that story about the money he owed, which she had offered to pay for him, and which, after all, there was no need to pay? What had he said to her in the summer-house, and, above all, what had he *meant* to say when he addressed her as "Miss Somers?"

Even now, in the tumult of her wrathful suspicions, the sharp pain recurred to her which she had felt when he had called her by that name. She had thought *then* that he had meant something more than he had said, and now she was sure of it. These

thoughts passed through her mind like waves in a troubled sea, which a strong wind moves rapidly. But near as instinct had brought her for the moment to the truth, she soon drifted away from it. She forgot, or perhaps she had been scarcely conscious of having employed them, the loving arguments she herself had used with Arthur on that very occasion; the worship she had paid to the mere mortal; the temptation of her beseeching tones, of her passionate despair, her tearful beauty. And leaving these out of the account, it was hard to explain why his resolution to cancel their engagement had given way as suddenly as it was formed, if his love for her had had any other obstacle to overcome than pride. At all events, this comforted her somewhat; and she clung to it as the exhausted swimmer clings to some rock, and climbs it, glad, though it is not land, to find a foothold, and present safety from the cruel sea.

"Thanks, Mr. Glyddon; thanks for your

candour," said she. "I felt you would be a friend in whom I could rely. If I have been wrong in speaking to you, forgive me. I could not apply for the information I required to the only person who should be my confidant. But one word more. I have appealed to you as a clergyman, remember, as I had a right to do, I think, on such a matter: you will not repeat what has been said?"

"Most certainly, I will not, Mrs. Tyndall; though I regret that—— You have a new sketch-book, I perceive" (for the three gentlemen now made their appearance): "I hope it is well filled with reminiscences of the beautiful Lake Country."

CHAPTER VII.

PATCHED UP.

THE drawing-room conversation that evening had been dull and forced, as the talk at dinner had also been. Both host and hostess were *distrait*. An opportunity had not yet arisen of discussing that momentous observation made by the representative of the infant school. It would have been better not to discuss it, perhaps, but Helen's conduct had rendered some allusion to the circumstance absolutely necessary. "Tact," of course, had been out of the question, as it always is when deep feelings are aroused;

but she might have manifested more self-control. It was folly to have denied her husband the kiss of welcome he had offered her, and by accepting which she might have made one of reconciliation ; worse than folly not even to have returned the significant pressure of his hand. For, after all, as Arthur reasoned with himself (if the suggestions of wrath and pride could be called reasoning), what right had she to feel resentment against him for having fallen in love with another woman before he had ever set eyes on Miss Helen Somers? Did she imagine herself the Ideal for the manifestation of which in the flesh his soul was to wait any number of years? Ideal indeed! She had made an idiot of herself, and her husband to look like a fool. He had not been so angry at first as he was now. If she had employed the hour or two that had intervened before dinner in thinking better of the matter, and sat down to table open to reconciliation, even willing to please and be pleased, all might have still

been well. But to Arthur, she had shown only coldness, and to their guests that exasperating cheerfulness of demeanour—forced, yet designed to appear forced—by which women exhibit their sense of wrong.

Such a state of things was insupportable beyond a few hours ; a mutual understanding—or its contrary—was inevitable. She would probably introduce the subject so soon as they were alone, and then the thing would be got over somehow—it almost seemed to him that it didn't much matter how, so that they had it out. This would perhaps have been the case but for Helen's confidential talk with the rector, of which, of course, Arthur knew nothing. But as it was, she no longer felt that eager desire to know the rights of the matter as respected Miss Alice Renn, which she had entertained at first. She could afford to wait to hear what her husband had to say for himself; and when he did speak, she had data by which to gauge his veracity. Eager, too, for the fray as Arthur had been, while the

opportunity was still afar off, his courage cooled as it drew near, just as a defier of ghosts grows less and less audacious as the shades of night draw in. He was by nature one of that considerable class of males, who, though not disinclined for excitement elsewhere, like quiet in their own homes, and the near prospect of a "row" with Helen grew more and more distasteful to him. He was not afraid of her, but, as has been already hinted, he was afraid of himself: always distrustful of the amount of his reserve capital of affection for her, he was conscious that it had already been drawn upon to a considerable extent by the events of the day. He felt that his sentiments with respect to her just now were not such as ought to be entertained for a bride of but five weeks. He wished that this particular night, at all events, they were a hundred miles apart, and *that* was not a pleasant reflection, considering that it was the first they would pass in their new home. Perhaps she would feel fatigued with her

journey, and be fast asleep before he retired. Then they would have no words about this matter, and in the morning, having "slept upon it," she would take more sensible views, and be herself again. In order to afford an opportunity for this desirable termination of the affair, he went on playing billiards with Allardyce for some time after his wife had taken her departure, and loitered away another hour in his dressing-room. Then treading softly, so as not to wake her, and opening the door with the caution of a burglar, he found the chamber a blaze of light, and Helen very wide awake, brushing her long tresses before the fire.

"I thought you would have been asleep," said he propitiatingly; he was offering her, as he thought, a third opportunity of "making it all up."

"I am not at all tired, thank you."

If ever a "thank you" might be paraphrased by "thank you for nothing," *that* "thank you" might have been. It curdled

the milk of domestic kindness in Arthur's breast, by what photographers call the instantaneous process.

"You are uncommonly cross, at all events," said he.

"I have reason to be—not cross, indeed, but hurt, annoyed, distressed."

"You have no reason whatever. You have nobody to thank but yourself for worrying a village school-child with foolish questions, till at last she gave you a still more foolish answer."

"A true one, however. You told me once that you had never been in love with another woman, and yet there is a girl in this very parish who has reason to suppose herself wronged by my being your wife."

"That is her affair and mine, not yours."

"What! yours, and not mine?"

She had risen from her chair, and confronted him; her blue eyes lit with flame, her silken tresses flying loose about her shoulders—she had, perhaps, never looked so beautiful, but her beauty did not occur to

him at all. "What a devil of a temper this woman has got!" was his reflection.

"Yes, it is her affair and mine, and not yours; I repeat it, Helen. I loved her before I saw you; I ceased to love her before I saw you; it is *she* that has the right to complain of me; not *you*. You have won me, she has lost me. What the deuce would you have?"

"You are speaking of love as though it were a stake at cards. You think more of cards than of it."

"Pardon me, madam." (His face had grown quite pale.) "I was speaking of the object of it, my humble self. As to cards (of which you so ungenerously speak), I gave up all thoughts of them, as you well know, when I married you—as of something else, more worthy." Angry as he was, he felt he had said too much.

"You mean, of this same girl," answered she swiftly. "And yet you tell me you had ceased to love her before you saw me."

"So I had. I am not going to be cross-

examined about my past, madam. I deny your right to do so. Suffice it, that I have done nothing, so far as *you* are concerned, of which I need be ashamed."

"*Qui s'excuse s'accuse*," said Helen. The use of that conventional phrase, he rightly thought, was a good sign. When matters are really serious, it is only French people who jabber French. Was there not here some opportunity—slight, but still perhaps sufficient—for his making a clean breast of it? Not for telling the whole truth, indeed—for it would be madness to do so, since a woman in her condition of mind would be sure to give credit to all that told against him, and to withhold it from what was in his favour—but for revealing a good deal of it.

"You are taking up this matter much too seriously, Helen," said he; "I mean, even supposing you are justified (which I altogether refuse to admit) in taking it up at all. Every young man has his flirtations, of course, and I had mine. This with

Jenny Wren was one of them. Perhaps you do not know that she was the daughter of the man that kept the *Welcome?*"

"You would have me believe it was a mere vulgar *liaison*," exclaimed Helen passionately.

"I would *not*," said Arthur quickly, and with a sudden flash in his cheek; "I would not do the girl such wrong. We were very young—both of us—at the time, and we did not take into account the barriers that society has interposed against such alliances. Undoubtedly, we thought of marriage, but only as children think to be always lovers; in reality, it was impracticable and out of the question. It might not have seemed so to the village people, who are always eager to believe in such romances, and that is doubtless how the idea got about which you heard to-day. But I don't believe Jenny—I mean Alice Renn—ever refused to teach the girls that song out of jealousy or pique. You are not fit to live in the country, I assure you, if you are so sensitive

to gossip." While he was about it, it struck him that he would throw in a precautionary hint for future contingencies; but, unhappily, this was lost upon her; there *are* times when a woman does stick to the subject of discussion.

"You call this girl Jenny, or Alice, indifferently, it seems; but others call her *Miss* Alice. Why is that, if she is an innkeeper's daughter?"

"All these matters are relative, my dear. Here you yourself are a great lady, whereas in London you were nobody very particular." (There's one for the *Hops*, thought he, and he laughed in the sleeve of his dressing-gown to see her wince.) "In this little village, old Jacob Renn has a certain position; he is rich and respected; and they call his daughter 'Miss.'"

"Then she is not really 'a lady' in her manners or ways of thought?"

Her eyes were riveted on him with earnest steadiness, but he little knew with what interest she waited for his reply.

The description of Jenny as given by the rector was fresh in her mind. Fixed as her thoughts had been, throughout the late conversation with Mr. Glyddon, upon the relations between this girl and Arthur, it had never struck her that there might be a personal reason for the rector's eulogies. She had taken it for granted that they were deserved, and generally known to be so. She was now about to learn, by proof, whether Arthur was bent on deceiving her or not. He did not answer for a moment; his mind was wavering; he was ashamed to depreciate Jenny for the sake of propitiating Helen; he was half-inclined to break out with; "Yes; a true gentlewoman; one who would never stoop to such contemptible behaviour as that of which *you*, madam, are now guilty;" but prudence restrained him.

"Well, 'a lady' is so vague a term. I thought her a lady when I wooed her as a boy; but I daresay I was not much of a judge."

"Was she well educated?" faltered Helen. The hope that she was going to learn the truth from Arthur's lips was dying within her. He had already equivocated with her. Would he tell her a lie?

"Educated?" replied Arthur; "how could the poor girl be educated? Certainly not. She knew next to nothing."

He was quite glad to be able to speak the truth this time. When he had fallen in love with Jenny, she had been wise, and good, and beautiful, and certainly "a lady" in her ways and manner, but of mere books she knew but little. It was in order to divert her mind from dwelling upon her lover in his absence, and—later, when the thought that he had forgotten her began to take hold of it—to prevent despondency, that she had given herself up to study. He did not know what the rector knew, and, unhappily, their respective statements were incompatible.

"That is false, and you know it!" cried Helen.

"*What* is false?" ("This infernal woman will drive me mad," thought Arthur.)

"All you have been telling me from first to last," replied she furiously. "You loved this girl when you asked me to marry you, and you love her still! I heard all about her this very evening from Mr. Glyddon."

Priests may keep *their* share of the burden of secrecy, but what is the use, when the other bearer of it is an angry woman? It is like a conscientious player at see-saw, who continues to sit on his end of the plank while the other is empty and in the air.

"Oh, Glyddon told you, did he? Then I suppose you asked him?"

"Certainly, I did."

"And that is your notion of a wife's duty, is it? To ask a priest to tell you lies against your husband, and then to believe them! I thought that all these High-church crotchets of yours were harmless follies; but it seems they are much worse.

That the parson has made a fool of you is only what was to have been expected, for, if I am not much mistaken, he is in love with this girl himself."

"O Arthur, I never thought of that!" exclaimed Helen, terrified at her husband's tone, which was harsh and grating; different altogether from what she had ever heard it; nor, indeed, had either man or woman heard him speak so before.

"I can believe you there," continued he bitterly. "You thought of nothing but the gratification of a mean curiosity; you wished to pander to a miserable sense of jealousy, for which your conscience told you you had no excuse. Madam, I wish you good-night."

He had closed the door behind him, and was gone into his dressing-room, before she could interpose a word. What had she said, what had she done, to provoke such a catastrophe as this? At first, she was indignant beyond measure. She had done nothing, she had said nothing, save what

the circumstances of the case had demanded. It was only right that she should make herself acquainted with Arthur's antecedents in the village, in order that things should go smoothly, and for her due administration (as "Lady Bountiful") of parochial affairs. To be sure, that idea had not struck her before (perhaps because it was a reasonable one), but she made a note of it now, though it was a little late. It was only natural that she should have applied for information on such a point to the clergyman of the parish. It was unfortunate, indeed, that *he* should have been in love with this girl (for that he *was* so seemed likely enough, now she came to reflect upon his manner as well as words, and how he had resented the suggestion that had impugned the girl's character); but not knowing that, it, of course, followed that she had believed all he said of her. "Mean curiosity," forsooth, and "miserable sense of jealousy!" She had a right to be curious, and (for that matter) to be jealous

too. She had little thought her Arthur had such a temper, or could be so easily put out. The idea of his slamming the door like that, after wishing her "good-night" so coolly! Was it possible that he really meant to sleep in the dressing-room? What would the servants say?

The clock on the mantel-piece struck two. "Well, the servants must be all in bed; that was one comfort." There was little else to comfort her. The fire burnt brightly, and the room was well lit and cheerfully furnished, but she felt cold and wretched. If she went to bed, she well knew it would not be to sleep. No; she would sit up, and presently he would come back again, and beg her pardon. An hour passed—the first half in expectation, the last in apprehension. When the mountain did not move at Mohammed's bidding, he went to the mountain; Helen followed (without knowing it) his sensible example. At three o'clock, she rose, and knocked at the dressing-room door.

"Arthur!" said she softly.

No answer. Great Heaven! had he done something dreadful?—cut his throat, perhaps—unable to bear the recollection of her unkindness! She *had* been hard upon him, poor fellow; and now she might have cause to repent it all her days. She almost expected to see his life's blood oozing under the door, but it was not; so she ventured, with trembling hand, to knock again.

"Arthur! Arthur dear!" cried she, a little louder.

"Well, what is it? Come in." She was reassured by his voice, which, though a little gruff (and, to say truth, grumpy), did not give any sign of a severed jugular vein. She opened the door, and found him lying outside the little couch in his dressing-gown, and reading the *Pickwick Papers*.

This was better than suicide, but rather too much (so to speak) in the other direction. Nevertheless, it was in a very plaintive voice that she inquired, "Are you not coming to your own room, Arthur?"

"Well, I have been driven out of it. You made such a dam—" (my belief is that he was going to say "fool of yourself," but there was that in her face which softened him) "such a damaging exposure of temper, that I am quite afraid of you."

"I am sorry to have made you angry, Arthur."

He got up and took her hand. "Nay, my dear, I am sorry too, to have made *you* angry—so very angry about nothing at all."

Here Helen distilled a tear or two—not of penitence, it must be owned, only a few drops of that unpatented elixir which women always keep by them to melt the stony hearts of men.

"Don't cry, pray, don't, my darling," pleaded he, overcome by this unexpected weapon. "I know I was very cross to you; I am afraid I behaved like a brute."

She did not deny it, but put up her fair cheek for him to kiss. It was a little damp, but he was very glad to kiss it.

"And you won't be jealous about nothing again, darling, will you?"

She answered "No," of course; but he, on his part, made up his mind to be even more cautious as respected Jenny than he had intended to be; and she, on hers, made up her mind to look after this "young person," who had thus already "come between" her Arthur and herself, most uncommonly sharp.

And so the quarrel was made up for that time; but it was not a good beginning of their domestic life at home, and ominous of ill for its future.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WATCH-DOG.

WEEKS and months went by at Swansdale without much event to mark them. The newly-married pair were received with all the gracious hospitality to which Helen had looked forward; and the Hon. Wynn Allardyce was asked wherever they were asked. His position began to be recognised as "a friend of the family," or, rather, as the French say, "of the house." For he stayed within doors a good deal. He did not care for field-sports; and when Arthur went with the hounds, or out shoot-

ing, his guest, as often as not, stayed at home with Helen. Arthur did not mind this at all, for he had no wish for Lardy's company. Yet somebody he had always with him. He had formed a steady resolution not to give himself an opportunity of meeting Jenny alone. He had met her, when walking with his wife and Allardyce, and bowed to her; but they had never interchanged a word. She played the organ at church, but the curtain always concealed her; he had caught himself looking up at it at times, when he thought Helen was not looking, and once or twice she *had* been looking, which was very unpleasant. Helen had extracted a promise from him that he should not take Mr. Glyddon to task for having answered her inquiries with respect to his old attachment, and this had a bad effect; for he could not help feeling aggrieved with the rector, and showing that he felt so; and this was, naturally enough, set down to another cause. "He is angry with me," thought Mr. Glyddon,

bitterly, "because he suspects that I love the woman that he has deserted, and who, for his sake, even now refuses to listen to my suit."

So, though there was no open rupture, the squire and the parson of Swansdale were not on good terms with one another; and the supposed reason why got, in course of time, to be whispered in the village, and at last reached Helen's ears. She did not speak of it to Arthur, but it rankled in her mind, and made her cold to him. To some husbands, this would not have much mattered. There are many respectable couples who live together amicably enough, not only without any demonstrativeness of affection, but in a state of armed neutrality; but to a man of Arthur Tyndall's temperament, such a state of things was very irritating. He sometimes took his gun and went out, not to kill birds, but time, and because home was intolerable. Then Mr. Wynn Allardyce would redouble his efforts to make himself agreeable to his friend's de-

serted wife, and to some extent succeeded. He did not succeed in making himself agreeable to his friend's uncle, and yet, five times out of six, when his hostess and himself were in the drawing-room alone together, playing duets (for he was a pretty good pianist, and, indeed, was an accomplished man in many ways) or chess, or engaged in some other innocent amusement, up would come Uncle Magus from the cottage, and sit with them until Arthur came home again.

"Here comes that fine old Irish gentleman again," said Allardyce, peevishly, looking out of the drawing-room window, on one occasion, when Arthur was out in the stubbles, and Mrs. Tyndall and himself were playing at backgammon.

"Poor Uncle Magus! I daresay he feels dull all alone in his damp little bower," said Helen, pitifully. She had taken to the old man, ever since she had learned that he had picked a quarrel with Mr. Paul Jones on her account. "It is a pleasant

change for him to come up here, no doubt; and I do believe he is very fond of me."

"I don't think that is to his credit," said Allardyce.

"Well, upon my word, that is a very civil speech, sir," and she tapped him sharply on the fingers with the caster; there was only one caster, the other having been lost, so that they had to pass it over to one another in turn. If Allardyce's fingers met her own by accident, sometimes, when this interchange took place, he did not now apologize for it, as he used to do at first.

"I mean to say he could not help being fond of you, and therefore deserves no commendation," explained Allardyce; he was looking fixedly at the board, as though in contemplation of his "move," and did not dare to raise his eyes from it, yet he would have given much to know if she were blushing.

"I wish that were the case," said she,

with no blush, but with a little sigh; "I mean that everybody was fond of me."

"Well, you don't expect the women to be so," laughed Allardyce; "that would be too much. We are told to love our enemies, but even the Scripture does not demand of us to love our rivals and our conquerors. I was reading a French novel the other day—a very correct one, however, I beg to say—in which the heroine is described as charming all mankind, save one, which, says the author, naturally involved her having all the women against her."

"And who was the hard-hearted exception among the gentlemen?"

"It was her husband." He shook the caster, again keeping his eyes upon the board. "*Quatre cinq!*" cried he. "I've hit your blot at last. But here is your uncle.—Mr. Magus, you are just in time to save Mrs. Tyndall from utter rout." For she had risen abruptly from the table, and evidently meant to play no more. There had been a certain sympathetic tone in

those words, "It was her husband," which she could not miss; it had startled her, and yet she was not altogether angry with him for sympathising with her. It was not to be expected that Arthur's treatment of her (that was the way she looked at it, never from *his* point of view) should pass unnoticed; and; doubtless, Mr. Allardyce, as a friend and a man of refined nature, pitied and felt for her. Why should he not? She could not tell; and yet she was —not annoyed, exactly, but—well, his doing so, or, at all events, his letting her know that he did so, had given her an uncomfortable feeling. She felt glad, as she had not felt before, that Uncle Magus had come in and spoiled their *tête-à-tête*. Mr. Allardyce, on the contrary, was more put out by his arrival than usual, and after a few commonplaces, left the room. Alone with Uncle Magus, she seemed somehow to breathe more freely; and yet she had a vague sense of oppression still, for which she could not account.

"It does not rain now, uncle. Suppose we take a walk in the garden."

"We two?" said he in well-pleased, yet half-incredulous tones. "By all means, my dear. That is," he added, "if you think it quite prudent."

She had been ailing lately; the situation of Swansdale *was* damp; and she had constant colds.

The old man's solicitude, which the intonation of his voice expressed even more than his words, touched her.

"Oh, it won't hurt *me*, uncle," said she; and I *should* so like it. I shall not be a minute putting on my bonnet and shawl."

"Mind you wrap up well, dear. I shall never be forgiven, you know, by somebody, if I cause you to catch cold."

He was very tender to her this ancient fire-eater, but also so loyal to Arthur, that he would never omit saying a good word for him. Well, that showed he felt the necessity for defending him, and was, in fact, a sort of confession of her husband's

ill-conduct towards her. Still, she would not let his words pass by without comment.

"I do not know who the 'somebody' is, Uncle Magus. I don't know anybody who would be more sorry, or perhaps *so* sorry, as yourself, if I took harm."

"Quite right, dear, quite right. It was your husband I was thinking of; but it is no wonder that you mistook me; it was foolish to speak of him in that way, because he is your very self. You and he are one, of course. Wrap up warm, my dear, wrap up warm."

Was this mere kindly simplicity in the old man, or was he determined not to see her meaning? She did not pursue the subject, but went to her room and dressed As she came down-stairs, she heard some one cough above her, and looking up, saw Mr. Allardyce leaning over the banisters.

"You are going on duty?" said he softly and with a little laugh.

"Uncle Magus has asked me to have a little walk with him in the garden."

"How I envy you!" answered he.

"Then won't you come with us?"

"No; thank you. *Au revoir.*" He put his fingers to his lips, and went back, with his usual almost noiseless tread, into the smoking-room to his beloved cigarettes.

Again that feeling of oppression came over her, and she stopped at the drawing-room door, with her hand upon her heart. Why had she told him that Uncle Magus had asked her to walk with him, when the exact contrary had been the case? Had she been afraid to vex him by saying that she had proposed it herself? She dismissed these questions as soon as asked, for they made her tremble. What she did reflect upon was, how very rude of him it had been to say: "How I envy you," since it presupposed that they two held in common a contempt for the old man, who, whatever his faults, had always shown himself her friend—of late, her only friend. Again, if it was not a downright rudeness in him to kiss his fingers to her, it was certainly an

unwarrantable liberty. In his very *Au revoir*, too—innocent as the phrase was—there had surely been an unpleasant significance. For the future, she would keep this agreeable gentleman at a distance.

Uncle Magus was not a great conversationalist at any time, but to-day he was more silent than ever. They walked on the terrace and underneath the box-tree wall, and nothing was to be heard but the craunch of their feet in the wet gravel; and yet the old man, who had her arm in his, kept pressing it and patting it, as though, since words had failed him, he would thereby express his solicitude and affection for her. Presently, they heard the report of a fowling-piece—a damp thud in the misty air, which the chalk-pit echoed dully.

"That is Arthur's gun," said Uncle Magus. "He is firing it off just before coming in."

The old man's voice had an air of gladness, as it seemed to Helen, which jarred upon her. Why should *he* feel pleasure to

know that her husband was coming home, when she felt none? or pleasure that was so mixed with wrath that it was next to none. In reality, if she could have read her companion's mind, it was not so much gladdened as relieved by the fact in question. He felt as the faithful watch-dog feels who has been on guard over the flock all day, and at last sees the shepherd coming.

"Do you know Arthur's gun by the mere report of it, Uncle Magus?"

"Yes, my dear. Just as old Giles knows what tree he is near at night, by the sound that the wind makes in its branches. Have you never seen my guns? Well, a shower is coming on, and my cottage is nearer than the Hall; so come in, and see them. You shall be back home again in time to meet Arthur."

"I daresay he will survive it even if I am not," said she.

The old man stopped, and looked at her fixedly, then shook his gray head, and

walked on. He had evidently something to say to her, but mistrusted his own powers of expression, "I would speak," said his look; "but I am a blunt speaker, and I might make things worse than they are."

Late as it was in the season, quite winter-time, in fact, there were still a few roses about the cottage. Its cleanliness and neatness were such as are only to be found in houses exclusively inhabited by males; not, of course, that man, in general, is so neat as woman, but when, from choice or necessity, he *is* neat, he eclipses her altogether. Into the tiny "lobby," with its tall clock and floor of snow-white stone; and into the little oak-panelled parlour, with its one picture—a portrait of Arthur as a child—Helen had been introduced, of course; but in the adjoining chamber, to which she was now invited, she had never yet set foot. It was a sign that you were a favourite indeed with Uncle Magus when you were admitted to his private bower. This was also oak-panelled, and though a

bedroom, had an air of greater comfort and "liveability" about it than its neighbour chamber. A round table with a huge desk, covered with manuscripts, stood in front of the fireplace, and beside it a high-backed arm-chair, curiously carved.

"Why, Uncle Magus, you must be an author," cried Helen, laughingly; "you must certainly be writing a book. What *is* it all about?" and she stepped forward to satisfy her curiosity.

"No, Helen; you must not read that," said the old man, stretching forth his long arm, and turning the papers over face downward, "for you would misunderstand it. It *is* a book, but not for ladies' eyes. That is, I mean," added the old gentleman hastily, and colouring like a girl, "it is upon a subject unfitted for the exercise of their judgment, being the Duello.—There are the guns."

He pointed to two guns hung above the chimney-piece; one, a fowling-piece, about which there seemed nothing remarkable,

though, to the owner's eyes, it doubtless revived many a palmy day on moor and stubble. He took it down, and looked at it affectionately. "Do you suppose I should not know the voice of this old friend, or ever mistake it for a stranger's? *That*"—he nodded his head towards the other, an old-fashioned weapon splendidly ornamented in gold and silver—"*that*, I believe, was the first gun ever used by any member of our race. It has descended from father to son, from son to grandson, I know not for how many generations: it will now, alas!" added he with a deep sigh, "descend no longer."

"And these pistols—are they very ancient also, Uncle Magus?" Two of these weapons were hanging beneath the guns, long in the handle, short in the barrel, and somewhat clumsy-looking.

"No, my dear; at least I can remember their being made. My father gave them to me upon the day I came of age. There are no gewgaws about them; but they have

been very serviceable in their time, and would be so again, should there be any necessity for their use."

"Lor, Uncle Magus, there will be no robbers at Swansdale, I do hope."

"I hope not, my dear, I'm sure," answered he; then added, after a little pause: "if there *were* to be one, it would be bad for him."

There was a certain vengeful quiet in that addition to the old man's speech—a sort of chained ferocity—that curiously agitated his companion. Her mother had always said that, "for her part, that Mr. Maggot frightened her to death," but Helen had never been frightened at him until now. She knew that he was not talking of robbers that steal gold and silver.

"Is that another gun," said she with affected sprightliness, "in yonder case?"

"No, Helen. Did your husband never tell you what it was?"

"Oh yes, I remember. Oh, Uncle Magus, I am so sorry!" She now recollected,

though, in her hurry to change the conversation, it had not occurred to her, how Arthur had told her that this singular personage kept the body of his only son embalmed in his bedchamber. The old man took no notice of her embarrassment; but his eyes, which were fixed on the object in question, a mahogany box, looking not unlike what she had taken it for—with brazen clasps about the lid, and brass-work round the key-hole—filled gradually with tears. "I am so very sorry, Uncle Magus," repeated Helen. She laid her hand upon his arm, and gently led him up to the arm-chair, wherein he dropped rather than seated himself. Her own fears and troubles were quite forgotten in her contemplation of the old man's agony—tears from such eyes had something awful in them.

"My only, *only* son—my heart's own treasure!" he murmured. "May Heaven grant, my dear, that your children may have a better end. I had cherished the dream—it was but a dream, they tell me,

but it made me happy—that some day my boy would have regained the inheritance of his fathers. I *kept* our ancient title-deeds —but no matter; they are waste-paper now even in *my* eyes. I thought, at least, to see him grow up and wed, and hoped, before I died, to dandle on my knees his offspring: but the old tree has died out, root and branch."

There was silence in the little room. Helen was kneeling at the old man's feet, herself in tears, not on his account only. If she had borne within her the promise of offspring of her own, how different she felt would *her* life be to her; what content, notwithstanding its troubles, would have blessed her present; what happiness would have seemed in store for her in the future. A child, she had read, endears a mother to its father, and to the mother makes the father doubly dear.

"Do you know how my boy died, Helen?" continued the old man in trembling tones.

"Oh yes, I know. Don't speak of it," she whispered. "It is too terrible even to think of. Poor lad, poor lad, poor Uncle Magus."

"Yet it might have been worse, my dear, both for him and for me."

"Worse?" echoed she in astonishment. "Worse than what Arthur told me? That is impossible."

"Not so, Helen," said the old man very tenderly, yet no longer with agitation. "He might have grown up and wed——" He hesitated, then stopped, and once more she saw in his face that look of mistrust in himself which she had noticed in the garden.

"A wicked woman," suggested she.

"No, no; my lad would never have done that, Helen; but he might have married one who, though she loved him dearly, might have misunderstood and vexed him, and he her; and—though there had never been any real ground of quarrel between them — the breach might have

widened daily, hourly, till it was very wide. Then—— Are you listening, Helen ?"

"Yes," whispered she, she was.

"Then, when they were thus apart, some smooth-tongued scoundrel, full of lures and smiles, might by degrees have interposed himself between them, and, ere she had scarce dreamed of harm——" Here a bell rang at the cottage-door. Helen rose hastily to her feet, very pale and trembling. "Rather than she were harmed by such a villain," continued Uncle Magus steadily, "being the wife of son of mine, I say that I prefer to see him as he is, a withered corpse, and to know that he died, *as* he did, of want, than lived to bear such shame."

"Uncle Magus, Uncle Magus, I have brought you some birds," cried Arthur's cheery voice in the other room. "Where are you ?"

"Will you see him ?" asked Uncle Magus with his eyes.

"No, no," she answered ; "not just now. I *could* not."

Then, covering her face with her hands, she sank down in the chair that the old man had quitted, while he went out to Arthur, taking care to close the door behind him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHALK-PIT—THE LOWER PATH.

HELEN had been shocked by the obvious application to her own position conveyed by Uncle Magus' words, but she had not been conscience-smitten; like the supposititious wife of the dead lad, she had scarce dreamed of harm; the worst thought she had ever had in her mind with respect to Allardyce was, to use him as a lure to win back her husband's love, by making him an object of his jealousy. And this she had altogether failed to do. Whatever might be his displeasure with his wife, Arthur had

the most complete confidence in her faithfulness and honour. Nay, to say that he gave her credit for the exercise of the same virtues that he used himself, was greatly to understate his confidence in her. There are some men who over-estimate the purity of women, as there are many who misprize and deride it; and he was of the former class. He might in his own case find it hard to prevent his mind from dwelling upon Jenny, though he loyally did his best to do so, and avoided her presence with the utmost care; but as to his wife, whom he knew to have had no lover before himself, forming after marriage an attachment to another man, such an idea was inconceivable to him. He would no more have suspected his Helen of a flirtation than Uncle Magus of a lie. Yet she *had* flirted with Allardyce—though with no ill intention, and even with a good one—before his very eyes.

To excite a husband's jealousy in order to recover his affection, is like some very

brilliant operation in surgery, which may at once restore the patient to health, but also may kill him outright. It is always safer to use more ordinary and gradual remedies; and the experiment in this case was especially hazardous, from the depth to which it was necessary to push the probe. Arthur's confidence was so complete, that strong measures were necessary to shake it; and though Helen had used them, they had as yet had no effect—that is, upon *him.* Mr. Wynn Allardyce, however, could not be supposed to be cognizant of Helen's ulterior view in making herself so very agreeable to him, and he naturally set it down to a predilection for himself, of whom, as a charmer of the fair sex, he had a justly high opinion. This predilection was reciprocal too; he had always had "a fancy" for this woman, and, as we know, had been reproved by Mr. Paul Jones (though not upon any high ground of morality) for entertaining it; and he more than suspected what was the fact, that he owed it to her only that

he had been asked to pay a second visit to Swansdale. It was true that Helen was by no means so gracious to him when they were alone, as in her husband's presence; but that he set down to coquetry, and of late he had found that even here she had shown signs of yielding. At all events, he had begun to push the siege with a vigour that had startled her, and now came Uncle Magus' warning to make her thoroughly aware of her peril. Most women, in her case, and especially if conscious of some imprudence, would have been filled with indignation against the man that had ventured to tell them the truth; but, to do her justice, Helen felt no spark of resentment against her ancient relative. He was not one of those vulgar persons who pride themselves on "speaking out" and "giving a piece of their minds;" on the contrary, he was reserved and silent; very slow to interfere with the affairs of others, and reticent to others concerning his own. She was convinced that he had spoken unwil-

lingly, and under pressure; and that, in his eyes at least, the danger of which he had so broadly hinted was great and imminent. It was certain that nothing but affection for Arthur and herself could have prompted him in the matter; no wish to make himself of importance; no love of scandal; no prudery; and though matters had not gone nearly so far as the old man had feared, for the future she would be careful for all that. Without being rude to Mr. Allardyce, she would let him perceive that marked attention from him, of any kind, was disagreeable to her.

Unhappily, her good sense stopped here. She could not indeed, go straight to her husband and tell him all, for he would certainly have wrung "Lardy's" neck upon the instant, or at least kicked him through the dining-room window; but she might have made such an appeal to him as would have brought him literally on his knees before her; it was even yet in her power to do that, by any show of her real love for

him, and she knew it; but her pride forbade this; she would extricate *herself* out of this trouble before trying to win him back, and, in the meantime, matters might go on between them as they were. Fabian tactics recommend themselves to women, while men prefer even a defeat in a pitched battle to a campaign of Delay; and Helen did not understand that to harass a husband such as Arthur Tyndall was, was to drive him well nigh to desperation. That his patience had been pushed to extremity, was certain, from the fact that he had, for the first time, confided to Adair that his wedded life was not a happy one; not that he had said so even now in so many words, but he had written him a letter in a tone of cynicism (altogether foreign to his character), and the subject of which was the married state. If he had thought to find sympathy in Jack, however, he was mistaken. So far from sympathising, Jack took the part of womankind, well understanding, without doubt, that it was the

part of Helen. His letter had displeased Arthur, and he had crammed it into the pocket of his shooting-jacket at breakfast, half unread. He had gone out as usual in the turnips, and finding the birds wild, had given up sport; then recollecting the missive in question, and wishing to read it in private, he handed his gun to the keeper, dismissed him, and took his way home, alone.

His path lay through the chalk-pit, above which was another path leading to "the Station," as it was called—not the railway station, but a sort of natural platform, commanding an extensive view, and on which an obelisk had been erected. This chalk-pit had witnessed many a loving interview with Jenny in the old days, and, indeed, was the very place that he had suggested as the scene for his proposed explanation, when he had first met her at the lock; but he was not thinking of Jenny now. He was thinking of his troubles at home; of the "cat-and-dog life"—though that was

an exaggerated term for the state of affairs between them—which he and Helen led together, and of Jack's want of appreciation of his position, evidenced by the letter he held in his hand. "To bachelors, and especially to those fellows who are fools enough to wish to be married," muttered he, resentfully, "it is the wife who seems always in the right. It is she who is 'oppressed' and 'sat upon,' and 'to be greatly pitied.' Man is a brute, and woman an angel, in their eyes. Angel, egad! They have all crowns on their heads and palms in their hands, but so have other people; to their husbands, at all events, they appear without their wings. What an altogether unsuspected talent they have of making a man uncomfortable! I dare say Blanche herself, if Jack ever gets her, will develop considerable faculties in that way; and it will serve him right." Arthur halted in the middle of the pit, which was a sheltered spot for that purpose, to reperuse his friend's letter.

"You say that there are idolators of the institution of marriage, just as there are of that of the Sabbath, whereas matrimony is made for man, not man for matrimony; with this I cordially agree. Of late years, however, people have taken sensible views upon this question, and if marriage does not prove a blessing, it is no longer necessary, thanks to our Divorce Court, that it should be a life-long curse. But there is surely an omission in one part of your statement: Matrimony is made for man, and woman also, let us say, &c. What is sauce for the goose (it was always agreed between us, as good radicals) should be sauce for the gander, and I think, since he is the stronger, and holds the purse-strings——"

"That foul blow is unlike Jack," ejaculated Arthur, passionately. "If he only knew how I regretted —— Gracious Heaven! *you* here, Jenny!"

Immediately before him, with a white face and very grave eyes, and holding a

little packet in her hands, stood Jenny Wren. At the sight of her, and the thought that they were alone together in the very spot where they had been used to meet as lovers, all his prudence was forgotten, and with a little cry of joy he held out both his hands to greet her.

So far from making any corresponding advance, she did not seem even to notice this action, but still holding the packet before her, observed: "I have long sought an opportunity of returning you these—these things, Mr. Tyndall."

"What are they, Jenny?"

"Some letters and a token you once gave me, which no longer belong to me."

"What! the little anchor?" exclaimed he, in astonishment; for, man-like, he had quite forgotten the existence of it, as of the letters also, until that moment. "Why, there can be no harm in your keeping that, Jenny." He took a pleasure, as one who rolls a sweet morsel under his tongue, in calling her by the old name.

"There can be no *good*," she answered, coldly, placing the packet in his hand.—"Good-day, sir."

"Have you not a word to say but that?"

She had turned already upon her way home, and did not even look back as he thus addressed her, but only shook her head.

He did not attempt to follow her; he knew that it would be madness as well as wickedness to do so; but he lifted the little packet for an instant to his lips ere he put it by, and then, with a little sigh, pursued his way.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHALK-PIT.—THE UPPER PATH.

"IT is quite clear, and there will be a beautiful view from the Station, Mr. Allardyce," said Helen one day, as the two—alone as usual—were about to leave the luncheon-table. "What do you say to a walk to the obelisk?"

"I am afraid you will find it damp underfoot in the wood," replied he, doubtfully. It *was* damp underfoot; but it was not out of consideration for Helen's health that he mentioned it. He greatly preferred a *tête-à-tête* with her in the drawing-room, ex-

posed though it was to the risk of interruption from Uncle Magus, to a walk with her out of doors. She had shown herself less inclined for playing chess and duets with him of late, and had kept him altogether more at a distance.

"Oh, the damp won't hurt *me*," said she, laughing. "One would really think, to hear you and Uncle Magus talk, that I was made of sugar."

"Well, so you are, in a sense, you know," said Allardyce, tentatively.

"Thanks for the compliment, sir," and she curtseyed. "Excuse me for a few minutes while I put on my cork soles."

"I wonder whether she *is* melting?" mused Mr. Wynn Allardyce, as he stood sipping a glass of sherry, with his back to the fire. "If I was a rich man, worth powder and shot, and Tyndall was a poor one, I should think the whole affair was 'a plant,' with a view to swingeing damages, the way in which he leaves his wife alone with me every day is so very marked. It

is but the result, however, I suppose, of that 'incompatibility of temper' that seems to exhibit itself in most men and women directly they marry one another. Well, so much the better for us bachelors. How jealous she is of that poor devil Tyndall! I almost wonder it don't turn her yellow; and yet I do believe he gives her nothing to be jealous about. I wish he would. The husband's ill-luck is the lover's opportunity, and if I could only catch him tripping, I think I could pay off old scores."

Mr. Allardyce's countenance began to be unpleasant to look upon. He detested Arthur Tyndall, for the very reason that it was to his staunch advocacy that he was indebted to the position—such as it was—that he still held in society, out of which his connection with Mr. Paul Jones had well-nigh cast him altogether. His benefactor, even as such, is always hateful to a scoundrel of the Allardyce type; and, moreover, in this case he well knew not only that he had obtained Tyndall's good word

under false pretences, but that if he should be proved culpable, his present ally would hold him as loathsome and contemptible as did any one of his detractors.

Perhaps it was the clear blue air and sunshine, or, perhaps, the reflection that she had done well in her avoidance of a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Allardyce in the drawing-room, that had given Helen an elasticity of mind she had not felt for weeks, and which showed itself in her eye and cheek; but certainly she had never looked more charming. She had a delicate, fragile air, it is true, and was very different from the plump, healthful girl we knew as Helen Somers; but that change was to her advantage. In time, indeed, so far from her growing to the ample proportions of her mother, it was only too likely that she would err in the other direction, and become pale and wan. "She'll be scraggy before she is thirty," was Mr. Allardyce's muttered prophecy; but at present it was hard to say where there could be improvement. Her dress

was faultless, too. In her fur-bordered mantle and dainty fur-trimmed boots, she looked—for, even if it be true that it takes three generations exempt from trade to make a gentleman, the saying has no force when applied to the softer sex—every inch a lady. She carried a muff, not because it was cold—for it was not so for the time of year—but in order to have an excuse for declining Mr. Allardyce's arm; and looked snug, and soft, and charming beyond power of pen to tell. Doubtless, she knew this well; but when her companion ventured upon a compliment upon her appearance, though couched so as to apply rather to her attire, so far from giving her pleasure, it annoyed her; she wished to avoid all such pretty speeches—her good resolutions were so spick and span—and she strove to let him know it by ignoring them. This was an error, since Allardyce set it down to distrust of herself, and resolved to push what he considered his advantage; his manner had never been so tender, his voice

so gentle and persuasive, as when they slowly climbed together that winding path that led through the leafless woods above the river. She felt her colour rise, and her heart beat faster than the toil demanded, though her fragile frame was taxed by the toil; and, finding that mere inattention did not check his honeyed words, she took another way. She began to praise the man she knew to be his enemy, Adair. Had he noticed in the papers how often Mr. Adair's name had appeared lately?

"In what part of them am I to look for it? There are bankruptcy, police, and so many things," answered he, carelessly.

"You can be very bitter when you please, Mr. Allardyce;" and there she stopped and blushed, for was it not as much as to say, "notwithstanding that you have been so uncommonly sweet and soft-spoken to me for the last ten minutes?"

"I hope not bitter," said he, with a little sigh; "but some things do make me—well, impatient and irritated. I daresay

this Adair may have his good points, and I have no doubt that he likes your husband; but he has no right to come between him and you."

"Come between me and Arthur! How do you mean?"

"Well, perhaps I was wrong to hint at it; but Adair's jealousy of yourself is something ludicrous. And yet Tyndall consulted him, too, before your mar—— But there, it is no business of mine."

"Consulted him about what? I insist—I entreat you to tell me, Mr. Allardyce!"

They were on the top of the hill now, on the path that traversed the brow of the chalk-pit, and from whence an exquisite landscape was discernible; but Helen had no thought for the view; her eyes were fixed inquiringly on her companion, and she had released one hand from her muff and laid it excitedly on his sleeve.

"Well, I am afraid it is something like a breach of confidence," said Allardyce, with pretended reluctance—"a betrayal of that

tacit understanding which men are supposed to have with one another—but I can refuse you nothing, my dear Mrs. Tyndall. The fact is, in club smoking-rooms and similar wicked haunts, it used to be whispered—now, pray forgive me, for I am only repeating what may have been a groundless scandal—that Adair 'got up' Tyndall's marriage."

"*Got up my marriage?*" The hand that had rested on his sleeve sought the railing that ran round the edge of the chalk-pit for support, for her limbs trembled with shame and rage.

"The story, my dear Mrs. Tyndall, since you will have it—though it distresses me above measure to repeat it—was this. Your husband, it seems, had formed another attachment before he saw you—no one can believe that it could have happened afterwards—and was said to be undecided in his mind as to which lady he should honour with his hand; and being accustomed to consult his friend Adair

upon all other matters, he consulted him on *that.* I cannot say what pain it gives me, Helen, to say these things."

"Go on, sir!" said she impatiently: in her bitter humiliation and fury at his tidings, she did not notice that he had addressed her by her Christian name. "Go on, I beg."

"Well, there is not much to tell; I have only instanced it, to show the undue influence that Adair possesses over Tyndall; and besides it mayn't be true; but what is *said* is, that the other lady was very strong-minded and resolute to hold her own, and thinking that she would be the more likely of the two to lessen his influence with your husband, Mr. Adair was graciously pleased to recommend that the handkerchief should be thrown to *you.*—But hush! there *is* your husband!" He took her by the arm, and dragged her back so as to be screened from view of any person that might be standing below, at the same time pointing downward into the pit.

Her fierce eyes followed the direction of his eager gaze, and fairly flashed with ire at what they saw. Advancing slowly from the direction opposite to that which they were taking, and reading as he did so an open letter, was Arthur Tyndall; and so engrossed was he in its contents, that he did not perceive, what was plain to the two spectators from their point of vantage, the figure of a woman coming swiftly through the wood as if to meet him.

"I think we had better go, Helen," said Allardyce softly, and with a tender pity in his tone. "This is not a scene for *you* to witness."

"Hush!" Again she knew not that he had ventured to address her by the familiarity of her Christian name; his insinuating speech, his commiserating glance, were lost upon her. She had eyes and ears only for what was going on beneath them. "It is that girl from the lock. I thought as much," muttered she between her set teeth.

"It *is*," said Allardyce; "and" (added he to himself) "a deuced fine girl too." All things were working well for him, and far beyond the best he could have hoped for. To have come upon this interesting spectacle so opportunely was a stroke of luck indeed. He had no doubt that the meeting between Tyndall and this girl was designed—was, in fact, an assignation; and that belief—mistaken though we know it to be—was greatly in his favour. Up to this time, he had had to invent his slanders, and to proceed with caution; the danger-signal is always up on the Line of lies; but now his road was clear. "I *think* we had better come away," reiterated he.

"I stay here!" interrupted Helen fiercely. Then added with sudden tenderness:—"Perhaps I do him wrong. This meeting may have been accidental, after all."

"If it is any comfort to you to think that, Helen, do so," said Allardyce, shrugging his shoulders.

"Comfort!" answered she, with such

bitter scorn that the word sounded like Despair. "You are right; I was a fool to believe him true. That letter he was reading was from her, appointing this place for their meeting. Look, she has given him another!"

It was at this moment that Jenny put the little packet into Arthur's hands. Except for that, nothing passed between them, as has been said, save a few words, which, unhappily, Helen could not catch. She only knew that her husband was speaking —doubtless of his treacherous and clandestine love. The whole interview, if it could be called such, did not last two minutes, and already Jenny was retracing her steps without a look behind.

"I do not understand this," murmured Helen, the hope that things were not so bad as they had seemed, beginning once more to dawn within her.

"Nor *that?*" whispered Allardyce with a sneer; and he pointed to Arthur as he raised the little packet to his lips and kissed

it. "You must be hard to convince indeed. O Helen!" he murmured, as, half-fainting with mortification and despair, she suffered him to support her with his arm, "is it possible that you can doom yourself to dwell for ever with a man who is blind to your charms, or prefers those of a village girl!—who, close to his own roof, has the baseness and cruelty to make assignations with her, and writes and receives——"

"Get me that letter," gasped Helen—"the letter which I saw him kiss; let me be once convinced!"

"What! is the evidence of your own eyes not to be credited? My poor, dear Helen! Well, you shall have that letter; and when you have certified yourself of his falsehood, believe, I entreat you, that there is still one loving heart—here, here—that will prove faithful for ever, and which only beats for you!"

He poured out his words with a fervour of passion that astonished himself; and

yet she seemed scarcely conscious of their meaning.

"That letter—if I could only see that letter!" was her pitiful reiterated cry.

"And again I say, you *shall* see it," responded Allardyce, in the tone of one who concludes a bargain. He felt that she had no great liking for himself; he knew that what her words implied was, that if indeed her husband had wronged her, she would be revenged upon him, no matter at what ruinous loss or disrelished shame. Yet with that much he was content. His promise of fidelity even—so far, that is, as he understood the meaning of the word—was genuine enough. Helen was an heiress, and would, doubtless, though a married woman, have money in her own right. She was not one to be flung away, when one was tired with her, like a toy. He foresaw not only an agreeable intrigue, but an investment.

"He is going to follow her!" exclaimed

Helen, as her husband moved slowly on wards.

"No, no; he is going home," said Allardyce reassuringly.

"Home!" moaned Helen. "There is no home for me!"

"There is," whispered Allardyce in her ear; "not here, but elsewhere; a new home, and loving arms, and a faithful heart!"

She shuddered, as though some cold and crawling reptile were in contact with her, but she did not say him Nay. "The letter —I must see that letter!" said she.

"That is understood, Helen. And now, let us go back to the Hall, for I am sure you are not equal to going farther. Take my arm, and lean on me—so. That is well: you must do your best to control yourself, and act as though nothing had occurred."

Arthur was in advance of them by some minutes, and his path was the shorter one, so there was no chance of a rencontre with

him. But Uncle Magus, watching at the wicket-gate, saw the pair coming through the wood, arm linked in arm, as he had never before seen them. When they came nearer, too, there was a certain look of subdued triumph in Allardyce's face which did not escape his searching eyes. "I shall have to shoot that fellow," he murmured to himself. "Well, better so, than that it should fall to Arthur's lot——Helen, my dear, your husband has just come in, and was inquiring for you."

CHAPTER XI.

FACE TO FACE.

WHETHER or not Uncle Magus had piously invented the statement that Arthur had been asking for his wife, mattered nothing to Helen. The scene to which she had so lately been a witness, had placed her relations with him on an altogether different footing from that which they had occupied an hour ago. It was no longer a question as to whether he was cold or affectionate, indifferent or eager for reconciliation; the breach between them, though only one of them could see it, had already widened to

an abyss. Though she had often accused him to herself of unfaithfulness, she had not in reality believed it; it was rather to excuse her own unwifely conduct towards him, and to keep warm her indignation against him, that she had pictured him in such dark colours; and now that she had satisfied herself of his perfidy, it came upon her with the shock of a revelation. It had been bad enough—"intolerable," she had called it in her own mind—to imagine herself an injured wife, but to *know* that she was so—that was wormwood. Her whole being revolted against the insult that had been put upon her; wrath and shame consumed her. If she had heard her husband calling "Helen, Helen!" ever so tenderly, she would but have scorned him for his hypocrisy; if he had met her with a smile of welcome, she would only have set it down, with Hamlet, "that one may smile and smile and be a villain." But, as it happened, Arthur was just beginning a late lunch in the dining-room, and at this

supreme moment (had he but known it to be so!) was dividing his mind upon the respective merits of cold beef and pigeon-pie.

Shut fast in her own chamber, Helen recalled his looks, his acts, his motions, as she had seen them from her post of espial above the chalk-pit, and each of them was fuel to her rage. She had cast her bonnet and mantle on the ground, but even thus she felt oppressed and feverish; and though the sun was low and the wind keen, she flung wide the window, and sat beside it, gazing out upon the river with heated eyes. How long she sat there, she knew not, but through her passionate and vengeful thoughts stole at last a sense of shivering cold, which warned her she was committing a great imprudence. The mists were rising from the stream, and curling above the tree-tops, and the thunder of the lasher was dulled in passing through them. What cared she, however, for cold and mist, or, rather, was it not better that they should

stream in upon her bare head and unprotected bosom thus—and thus—and enwrap her in a veritable shroud! But no; they should not do that; for if she should die, that jade the lock-keeper's daughter would wear in triumph, and without concealment, the prize that she had already won; her death would be just what the guilty pair desired, and therefore she would live on, to baulk them. She closed the window, and sat down before the fire, which was now always burning in the room, once more to think, and think, and think, upon her wrongs. She did not even reflect upon the revenge which she had promised herself, momentous as it must needs be in its consequences to herself. The man Allardyce did not enter into her thoughts, except so far that he had promised to procure for her that packet which should resolve all her doubts. For she *had* doubts even still. It was just within the limits of possibility that some satisfactory explanation might yet be offered of the interview to which she had

been witness; but no; it was folly to believe *that:* her only comfort lay in the hope that this discreditable flirtation might have originated with Jenny, not with Arthur; that it might not as yet have gone beyond flirtation; and that she might nip it in the bud by some sharp decisive action. The indulgence of this hope was the only evidence that remained to her that she still loved her husband, for she was not ignorant of human nature, and if she had had to form an independent judgment on the matter, she would have set down the blame to the man rather than the woman. But now she clung to the idea that her Arthur was a victim—though, alas, not an unwilling one—to Jenny's crafty wiles. She would know that for certain, however, only when she had made herself acquainted with a specimen of their correspondence; and in the meantime how should she endure the suspense? How should she live under the same roof, and sharing bed and board, with this man who had thus dishonoured

her? How long would it be ere an opportunity should present itself either to her or Allardyce—she scarce cared which—to get possession of that tell-tale packet, to which her husband had pressed his faithless lips?

Then all of a sudden a desperate determination seized her to know the worst at once; not to ask Arthur—for she felt that would be hopeless; the so-called honour on which men pique themselves would prevent him from betraying a woman's secret, though it had not restrained him from behaving treacherously to his wife. She would learn the truth from Jenny's own mouth, though she should have to take her by the throat to wring it from her. The next minute she had thrown on her walking gear, and stood listening at the half-opened door. The house was still, and a faint odour of tobacco in the corridor gave assurance that either her husband or Allardyce (probably both) were in the smoking-room. There was little risk of meeting Uncle Magus, who mostly kept within doors in

his own home, when his services as volunteer watch-dog were not required at the Hall. If one of these three, or indeed any member of the household or the village, had seen her, she could not, of course, have escaped recognition; yet she wore a thick veil, put on either mechanically, or as some safeguard against that danger which, but a few minutes ago, she had so rashly courted. Quickly, yet noiselessly, she descended the stairs, and passing through one of the sitting-rooms, the windows of which opened on the lawn, she left the house unobserved, and started for the lock. The fog had increased, and was advancing from the river in a solid wall. Once within it, however, she could see a little, and besides, there was the noise of the lasher to guide her. But her path was not without its peril, for the little bridge she had to cross was very narrow, and slimy with the damp, and how easy (thought she) would it have been to slip over its unprotected side, into the sheer dark lock! That would give

them pause, those two! Their consciences would surely prick them when they came to know that she had watched their interview that day, ere she came here to end all. But perhaps Allardyce might not disclose it to them, and perhaps—she was here now to discover it—perhaps her husband might not be so very very much to blame. She crossed the bridge, and approaching the cottage, pressed her face close to the diamond panes of the parlour-window. Old Jacob was in his arm-chair by the hearth, apparently asleep; Jenny sat at the table with a book before her, but looking at the fire pensively. How very beautiful she was! If she had been a lady (thought Helen), it would have been no wonder that she should have attracted any man; nay, she did not *look* unlike a lady; the hand on which her head was resting was white and shapely, and her attire, though simple, was tasteful and becoming. She knew, of course, what did become her, and took care to wear it; her very simplicity might even

be affected, in order to contrast with the appearance of real ladies, and so to—— Here, passion cut short these strictures, and she tapped softly on the glass.

Jenny glanced up at the window, and seeing only the curtain of fog that overhung it without, turned her eyes again towards the fire; they were tearful eyes, as Helen now noticed, and had a weary, hopeless look in them; but then their owner had not seen Arthur kiss that packet: if she had, they would doubtless be triumphant enough; this jade did not know that her wanton wiles had made such way with him as they really had.

Helen tapped again, and this time very sharply. Old Jacob stirred and murmured: "Mother of Sherry!"—like a good Catholic who, roused from sleep, calls on a saint or two—then sunk into a sounder slumber than before. Jenny rose and came to the window.

"Come out!" motioned Helen imperiously; "I must speak with you."

Jenny put on the bonnet and shawl which lay on a chair beside her, and let herself softly out. Her face had grown very pale, but she did not look afraid, as the other had expected; the tones, too, were quite firm in which she said: "Will you not come into the parlour, madam?"

"No," answered Helen. "I want to speak with you alone, where no one can hear us."

"There is my own bedroom, madam; there is a fire there."

"No!" reiterated the other, even more curtly than before. "Take me somewhere outside, out of earshot and eyeshot."

"There is the lasher, madam," suggested Jenny; "few people cross it, especially in this weather——"

"That will do," said Helen, interrupting her. "Take me there."

"It is very foggy, madam; you had best keep close to me. She would have offered her hand, had her visitor been any other woman; but she well knew that this one

would have rejected it. She had nothing to reproach herself with, yet she could not but be aware, from Helen's tone and manner, that it was to reproach her—to impugn her conduct with respect to Arthur—that she had come thither. They had met in the chalk-pit that day by chance, and she had given him back those tokens of their old love she had thought it wrong to keep, and which she had carried about with her for weeks in case such an opportunity should occur; there had been no harm in that, surely! This woman had won him from her, and possessed him; *she* had not been forgotten and forsaken; what cause had *she* for fancying herself aggrieved and wronged? Jenny stopped under the lime-tree, which was her favourite haunt, but "No," said Helen; "here people may come upon us without our seeing them."

She led the way herself on to the broad plank that spanned the lasher from end to

end. If any one should put foot on it from either bank, its tremulous recoil would at once inform them of it.

"Be careful," said Jenny, warningly; "you are not used to this place as I am; it is dangerous."

"You are most kind," returned Helen, scornfully; "and very anxious to preserve my life, no doubt." She walked on to the centre of the plank, and then turned round on Jenny. "So this is the face that caught my husband's fancy in his boyhood, was it," said she, regarding her with great disfavour, "and has kept it ever since?"

Jenny's cheeks flushed crimson, but, strangely enough, anger was not her predominant feeling: looking at this woman, her successful rival, face to face, she could not help reflecting what a coarse, passionate expression it wore, and how unlike a gentlewoman's.

"You had better answer me," said Helen, menacingly. That cold, almost

contemptuous gaze of Jenny's made her well nigh frantic.

"What would you have me say?" said Jenny. "It is quite true that in his youth the man who is now your husband proffered love to me. Do you come here to taunt me because he forsook me for yourself?"

"Impudent jade!" cried Helen. "Don't speak of myself and you as though we were equals, but answer what I ask. Has he *kept* his fancy?—love, if you choose to call it so, who cannot know what honest love means. I say, does he love you still? That you love *him*, after your low base fashion, I know——"

"You do *not* know, if you call it mean and base," interrupted Jenny, haughtily.

"Then you do love him, wanton girl; you have confessed it."

"I have nothing to confess," returned Jenny.

"What! Not that you met him by appointment in yonder chalk-pit this very afternoon?"

She saw us there, thought Jenny; there is some excuse, then, for this insolent fury, though it is wholly undeserved. "It is quite true, Mrs. Tyndall," said she, calmly, "that I met your husband, as you state, but it was not by design. We scarcely interchanged a word, and—and——"

"You hesitate, girl; you are about to tell a lie! What was in that packet you gave him, and which I saw him kiss?"

For the first time throughout this terrible interview Jenny trembled; not for fear, but because she heard from that most trusty messenger (when an unwilling one), a rival's tongue, that Arthur had kissed the token she had returned him, of his ancient love. He might not love her still—it was not right he should do so—but he at least entertained a tender recollection of those departed days, in which her own hopes and happiness lay buried. And this woman, who had lost nothing and had gained all, grudged her even that!

"What was in that packet, I say?" reiterated Helen. "Tell me; I insist on knowing!"

"You never shall!" answered Jenny—"at least from my lips: you have no right——"

"Right! you dare say that to me?" cried Helen, seizing her fiercely by the wrist. "Tell me this instant, or I will fling you in the river; by Heaven, I will!" She was not naturally a more powerful woman than Jenny, but that short madness, passion, had lent her the strength of madness. "Tell me, tell me!" repeated she; and with each iteration of the words she dragged her rival nearer to the edge of the plank.

There was really no sufficient reason why Jenny should not have told her what the packet contained, but her pride rebelled against doing so on compulsion; perhaps, too, it seemed to her a sort of sacrilege to speak to this furious scoffing woman about those old love-letters which still "kept their green" for her, and that dear emblem of

fidelity, the golden anchor, the significance of which had been so belied.

"Will you tell me what was in that packet, you slut, or will you not?" cried frenzied Helen.

"I will not!" answered Jenny, struggling vainly on the slippery plank with her furious enemy.

"Then drown!" cried Helen, passionately; and in another instant, half pushed, half slipping, Jenny was in the hurrying stream. It ran beneath the plank like a mill-race, and underneath it, escaped into the roaring fall through an iron grating. The strongest swimmer in the world once beaten against that would have sunk, bruised and battered; and so swift was the current, that Jenny's feet already touched it, though her hands clutched at the plank, and held her head above the stream for a single instant. Short as the space was, however, repentant Helen had already thrown herself upon her knees and grasped her drowning rival by the hair. Hate,

anger, jealousy, had taken flight together, and horror, remorse, already filled their place, within her breast; she was no longer a fury, but a woman: she felt, even though she should save this girl, that the guilt of murder would lie upon her soul for ever; and yet she would have given her very life to save her. She was hazarding it now: she clung to those long luxuriant locks, which she had loathed but a moment since for their rich beauty, as to her dearest hope; and twined and twisted as her fingers were in them, and unstable as her own position was upon the foam-flecked plank, it was more than likely, when Jenny should be carried under, that she would share her fate. But not a thought of her own danger urged that passionate appeal for "Help, help, help!" which rang from her through the misty air, and shrilled above the thunder of the fall; her cry to Man, her silent prayer to God, was for Jenny only: "Save her! help! save her!" How terrible in its dumb agony looked that fair wet face,

that almost touched her own, and which in a minute more would be dumb and dead! What reproach dwelt in those terrified eyes, that were about to close for ever! What ghastly memories would that moment leave behind it, to haunt her for her whole life long! "Help, help! O help!" But there was no answering sound save the ceaseless roar beneath, and the swirl and rush of the current above; nor was anything to be seen save the damp white wall which the mist had built up around them. In truth, the end was imminent, to one, if not to both; for Jenny's fingers could no longer retain their hold, and Helen's energies, already weakened, were wholly unable to meet the double call thus made upon them. "O help, help, help!" shrieked she, in mortal strait, and to that last agonised cry, extorted by despair rather than uttered with any hope of assistance, assistance came. A weight seemed to fall on the plank and shake it from end to end, and rapid footsteps, careless of all danger,

hurried along it till they reached Helen; and then one strong hand mingled with her own, and another reached down into the flood and seized on Jenny's arm, and bore her body up out of the clutch of Death.

CHAPTER XII.

HELEN ASTONISHES THE RECTOR.

IT was Mr. Glyddon who had rescued Jenny, and perhaps Helen also, from the raging stream. He took her in his long arms (which, dripping and half-drowned as she was, had never borne so welcome a burden), and carried her into the cottage. He had come down thither from the village to see her upon some business, or pretence of business, concerning the choir, and found old Jacob asleep and alone. Was it possible, thought he, that even on such a misty afternoon she might

be found near her favourite lime-tree? Without waking the old man, he had gone out to see—if such a word could be used in such weather—and when close to the lasher had heard Helen's last despairing cries. The rector was a Christian gentleman, unselfish (as men run), and of a tender heart, yet he could not avoid the silent reflection, as he strode across the garden with his precious burden: "May not this be fortunate for *me* as well as for her?" To be loved out of gratitude is not so satisfactory, doubtless, as the being loved for ourselves, but it is better than to win no love at all, where we have so passionately sought for it; and ever since that last interview with Jenny he had given up hope of gaining her affections. He had still hovered about her, like a bee around some flower whose blossom affords no honey; pity from her was more dear to him than love from another; and now, if he had won—not her love, but—even the toleration of his suit by loving service, he would be content indeed.

She had given him one feeble glance of thankfulness when he had lifted her from the stream, but immediately afterwards had become unconscious; and he had treasured up that look in his soul to comfort him for ever.

"How did this happen?" enquired he, as he hurried with her across the misty lawn, with Helen close beside him.

Ah, how *did* it happen? For the first time, the gravity of the occurrence, as it concerned herself, flashed on Helen's mind. If Jenny should denounce her, her position would be critical indeed. It would be difficult, considering their mutual relation, even to shew that she had not gone down to the lock with a malicious, perhaps murderous intention, and still more so, to deny what really was the fact, that in a moment of exasperation she had pushed her supposed rival into the river. But, in truth, she did not at present think of defending herself against the latter charge. She was still penitent for what she had done, or

rather for what she had so nearly done, and was content to suffer for it; but her dislike to the girl, which had vanished while she was endeavouring to rescue her, had already returned, though not with its former violence.

"I don't rightly know how it happened," she replied.

"I can quite believe that," said the rector. "For my part, I wonder you kept your senses. Had you lost them but for an instant, this poor girl would have perished. You saved her life, my dear Mrs. Tyndall, and at great risk, though your generous heart may not have been aware of it, and by that act you have made Charles Glyddon your debtor for ever!"

At such a moment he could make no secret of his love for Jenny; and having thus disclosed it, and being now at the cottage door, he gratified an impulse, that had all along been gradually overpowering him, to press his lips to the cold unconscious cheek that lay so near his own. "I

leave her to your tender care, dear Mrs. Tyndall, until I can fetch the doctor." And then there was the sudden awakening of old Jacob, who, dazed though he was by the astounding spectacle of his daughter's condition, was moved by native instinct to do the best thing that could be done—namely, to administer a glass of brandy; and with Helen's help and that of the servant, Jenny was rubbed and dried and put to bed in her own room; and there she lay, not fully conscious, but slowly coming to herself; and Helen sat by the bed-side.

From time to time old Jacob would hobble in (for the mother of wine had borne gout to him), to see how Jenny was going on, and to reiterate his thanks to Mrs. Tyndall, for, from something the rector had said, he understood that it was to her he owed his daughter's life; and these inroads were welcome to Helen. She listened with seeming interest to the old man's praises of his darling, for next to himself, Jenny had always been most dear

to him—dearer even than his sherry—how she was as good as she was beautiful, and how she had refused a lord, because she would not leave her poor old father (he had got to believe this after dinner, though of a morning the affair in question did not appear to him as having been quite so ripe); and—would she believe it ?—though Jenny was so wise and learned, as doubtless she had heard, she suited his little household to perfection, and could cook a cutlet, with just the right taste of tomato about it, fit for a queen. It was better to hear all this rubbish than to find herself alone with Jenny when she should begin to recall what had happened, and to speak about it. She had a suspicion, however, that Jenny had by this time come to herself, and of design kept silence. Perhaps she was waiting for a fit audience in order to proclaim her as her would-be murderer. What was to be, must be. She would prefer even that line of conduct to the assurance of any patronising protection from

Jenny's lips, and, above all things, to being pardoned for her husband's sake. Still, when voices were heard in the garden, announcing Mr. Glyddon's return with the doctor, a shudder ran through her frame. It really lay within the power of this hateful girl to disgrace and destroy her, if it pleased her so to do; and she hardly knew whether she should hate her most for showing malice or generosity.

The doctor came—the rector and old Jacob with him—and bent down over the patient. As Helen had surmised, the latter had long ago come to herself, and was quite prepared for his questions, which she answered in low but distinct tones.

"Come, this is much better than we could possibly have expected," said he—"Mrs. Tyndall, you must have taken excellent care of this young lady?"

"There was but little that could be done," said Helen, her eyes turned full upon the questioner, her ears waiting anxiously for the first words from Jenny's lips.

"There was a great deal to be done upon the lasher bridge," broke in the rector enthusiastically, "and but for Mrs. Tyndall——"

"Yes," interposed Jenny's quiet voice, "it was Mrs. Tyndall who saved me. She snatched at my hair when I slipped in, and was being carried beneath the plank, and never loosed her hold till I was safe."

A burning blush overspread Helen's face, and for the first time she looked towards Jenny. But Jenny's eyes had already closed again, perhaps to avoid having to reply to her glance.

"She is still faint and weak," said the doctor; "that is only to be expected: we ought to be thankful indeed that things are no worse.—How did the thing happen, Mrs. Tyndall?"

Before Helen could answer, the low soft voice from the pillow was heard again.

"It was the work of a moment, doctor; I was showing Mrs. Tyndall the lasher, and we very foolishly ventured upon the

plank, which the fog had rendered more slippery even than usual; and I fell in.—I hope, father, that you have thanked Mr. Glyddon, for it was he who——"

"Nay, nay," said the rector, while his eyes notwithstanding greedily pastured upon her grateful smile: "it is to Mrs. Tyndall you owe all your thanks: I did but give my mite of help at last, though Heaven knows how gladly!"

His fervour brought a tinge of colour into Jenny's cheek; she was shocked to see that her mischance, or the part he had taken in it, had excited in him anew a hope that she felt was as far from being realised as ever. Helen saw the blush, but put a different construction on it. Perhaps this girl had some regard for the rector after all, which her gratitude might warm into love. She had been really touched by the girl's generous conduct, which had certainly been exhibited without a trace of triumph over her; but *now* she began to thaw towards her to a degree that a minute since she

could not have credited. For if Jenny became Mrs. Glyddon, she would no more be a source of apprehension ; she would no longer molest her husband. If Jenny and she had been alone together now, she would even have expressed her repentance for the passionate act she had committed, and her sense of the kindness which Jenny had shown in concealing it. But this was not to be.

There are hasty footsteps in the garden, an importunate knocking, and then who should present himself in Jenny's chamber but Arthur himself! Panting and eager-eyed, like one who has been running fast to hear great news, he stood irresolute at the open door.

" Come in, Mr. Tyndall," said the doctor, laughing : " this is the reception-room to-night, and we have cause for congratulation that it will not be used by the coroner and his twelve jurymen. There, you can shake hands with the patient, if you like, and wish her joy at her escape."

Jenny blushed like a peony, as she held out her hand, and Arthur uttered a few cordial but common-place words. "I only just heard of your accident," added he, "and ran down at once, in hopes—" here his eye for the first time lit upon Helen, who had been partially concealed by the bed-curtain—"in hopes to be of any good. But I see you have plenty of good friends about you;" and he cast a glance of genuine gratitude and affection at his wife.—"I did not know *you* were here, Helen."

He thought she had hurried down from the Hall, like himself, at the news of the catastrophe, and with the same object.

"If Mrs. Tyndall had *not* been here," observed Mr. Glyddon earnestly, "and that before any one of us, you would never have seen Alice Renn alive! It was your wife who saved her life at the lasher."

"My *dear* Helen!" ejaculated Arthur, as he came round eagerly towards her, "how good and——"

"Hush!" said she, interrupting him

coldly, and turning away to Jenny: "you are not fit to be in a sick-room.—Your patient should be kept calm and quiet—should she not, doctor?"

"Oh, Miss Jenny will do very well now," returned the doctor, cheerfully. "I think we ought to attend to *you*, rather. You look very pale and tired, Mrs. Tyndall, as well you may, after your noble exertions. If you will follow my advice, you will just swallow a glass of wine, and then go home."

Mrs. Tyndall was very pale, but not tired, or at least she was far too excited to feel so. How infamous it was of Arthur to run down to the lock, just because he had heard that this girl had got a wetting, and to force himself into her very room! It was very well for her father, and the doctor, and even the rector; but for a married man, who had no sort of business there, it was a most abominable proceeding! As for his thanks to her—the tribute she knew he had been about to pay to her for her supposed generosity towards her rival—it

was an insult! He would have been glad if things had happened as he thought they had, no doubt; it would have been very pleasant to him to imagine that Jenny and she were friends, and that he had her leave and license for the future to speak with this girl whenever he met her, and carry on his flirtations under her very eyes! She hated Jenny worse, and was more angry with her husband than ever; she almost regretted that she had been in such a hurry to undo the work of her own hands—to bring back this girl to life, when already half-way to the other shore—only to become perhaps a greater curse and trouble to her even than before.

"Come, Helen, dear; you hear what the doctor says," pleaded Arthur, guessing some of the thoughts that agitated his wife, but feeling very grateful to her, and most anxious to please: "let us go home together at once. You have behaved like a heroine, Glyddon tells me, but you can be of no further use here now."

Even that annoyed her, and increased her bitterness against him. Having heard that she had saved this woman's life at the risk of her own, he was still considering, forsooth, whether she could be of further "use" to her!

"I think *you* had better go home," said she in cold low tones; "men are always in the way when there is illness. Besides, you have left Mr. Allardyce alone."

"Mr. Allardyce!" repeated Arthur, contemptuously.

Helen laughed a little harsh laugh, which she knew to be her husband's especial abhorrence.

"Of course, Mr. Allardyce is nothing to you nor anybody else, in comparison with this catastrophe," whispered she mockingly. "Still, I think you may leave the interesting patient, now, with confidence: unless, that is," she added, sinking her voice still lower, "your conscience tells you that she deserves poison at my hands!"

When husband and wife whisper to-

gether in company, it is generally understood that they are not exchanging compliments; but, on the present occasion, no person in the room had an idea that they were disputing upon any more serious subject than whether Mrs. Tyndall should leave her charge immediately or not.

"My conscience reproaches me with nothing, Helen, as respects that girl—that is, so far as you are concerned," returned Arthur solemnly.

If he had confessed his guilt, she could not have felt more outraged than at this reference to his old attachment for Jenny. If she had had any hesitation about refusing to go home with him, she felt none now: she would not have taken his arm, and walked with him alone just then, for any bribe. Again came that bitter feminine laugh, which is to a real laugh what a sneer is to a smile.

"Your concern for *me* in the matter is very great, no doubt; but I don't wish to

talk of that: whether you go or stay, I shall remain here."

"If you will, you will," said Arthur with a sigh; then speaking aloud, he added: "I will send your maid with some extra wraps in half an hour, Helen."

She made no answer, but, as he wished the patient good-night, fixed her eyes steadily on him—a proceeding which she well knew would embarrass him exceedingly, upon Jenny's account, and which did not fail of its intent. Within five minutes of his departure, she rose herself to go.

"But your wraps are not come, Mrs. Tyndall," said Jenny, really solicitous for the other's health; "and the fog is as bad as ever. If you would not mind using some of mine," added she timidly.

"I shall do very well, thank you," answered Helen coldly. "I shall walk fast home."

"But not alone," interposed Mr. Glyddon. "You must allow me, my dear Mrs.

Tyndall, to be your escort." The rector and Helen accordingly started together.

"I am glad to have this chance, Mrs. Tyndall," said the former, as soon as they were alone, "of once more thanking you for to-day's good deed. You already know my secret with respect to Alice."

"Yes," said Helen, stopping for an instant, with a fierce expression on her face; "but you don't know mine."

"Yours? O yes; I remember to what you allude," said Mr. Glyddon, greatly embarrassed. "It was a most unfortunate incident to have happened on the very day of your return; but as I told you then, that affair between Alice and your husband has been over long ago."

"You think so," said Helen bitterly.

"I am sure of it, Mrs. Tyndall. And as to anything being between them *now*, if that is what you mean, I am shocked and astonished at your hinting at such a thing. You ought to know your husband better; and as for Alice, I will answer for her——"

"No doubt, you will," interrupted Helen, grimly: "she is an angel. Well, she has been very nearly going to her own place (I mean heaven, of course) this afternoon, you know."

"My dear Mrs. Tyndall, I entreat you not to talk in this way. Do not jest at what should be a source of thankfulness and——"

"Not to *me*," interrupted Helen, vehemently. "I tell you plainly, not to me. Your Alice is an artful, deep, designing girl."

"O *no*, O *no*," pleaded the rector, vehemently. "I could not bear to listen to such words — such false and slanderous words—but that I know you speak in passion, under the excitement of a woman jealous without cause."

"Without cause!" repeated Helen, bitterly.

"Yes, wholly without cause. Alice Renn is incapable of an immodest thought, even if Arthur (which I do not believe)

should be so base as to put temptation in her way. You wrong them both, madam."

"Your credulity, Mr. Glyddon, may arise from your own exceptional purity and goodness, but it proclaims you to be a fool."

"Call me what you please, madam," said the rector, turning very red, nevertheless. "I would rather be over-credulous than without common charity and—and—decent feeling. You have made me angry, I confess, but not upon my own account. Your suggestions concerning Alice Renn, I repeat, are false and infamous; nor could I have listened to them, but for the reflection that she who uttered them had, but an hour or two since, preserved her life."

A shrill laugh broke upon the misty air, as though an evil spirit was making merry near them.

"You are quite wrong there again; for it was I who pushed her in!"

"You pushed Alice into the river? You?"

"Yes, I did.—You take your arm at once from mine, of course. You loathe to touch me now. I expected that. You may tell all the world, for what I care, and cause them to shrink from me likewise. Anything is better than to suffer the protection and patronage that I have endured this evening; anything is better than to owe my safety to the generosity of such a jade as that. Not that she would have held her tongue for long. *I* know her. Here and there, first to one, and then to another, she would have whispered: 'Now, would you believe it? that woman pushed me in before she saved me, and yet I never said a word to harm her. I said I *slipped*.' Well, she shall not do that. When she comes to tell you her pretty story—how well she has behaved, and what a wicked wretch I was—it will now miss fire."

She had spoken with such vehemence and passion that it was impossible to interrupt her for an instant; but here she paused, not for want of words, but breath.

"I cannot believe my ears," gasped Mr. Glyddon; "I hope, I pray, that what you have said, Mrs. Tyndall, has been spoken in sheer frenzy. Are you aware that, if it be true, you have attempted to commit murder?"

"I wish I had *done* it! Listen to that, and doubt your ears if you can. You will believe it, however, rather than what I told you before, that your Alice is a wanton. And yet the one is as true as the other. Here is the house that is called my home—my *home!* You will not cross its threshold, perhaps, after this disclosure. Good! Go back to this girl, then, and tell her that you know all, and that she need tell no more lies on my account. Good night."

She had gone in and the door had closed upon her ere he could frame a sentence. The rector's whole theory of life had broken down under this tremendous revelation. His profession had given him a painful experience of humanity: he had seen oftentimes, despite the Psalmist's

testimony to the contrary, the seed of the righteous begging their bread ; the diligent man unable to procure work ; the religious man haunted in death by ghostly terrors ; the infidel dying at ease. But here there was a greater anomaly than all. He had not been unacquainted with persons who had repented to him, as a priest, of hidden crimes of various kinds ; but here was one convicted by her own lips of the worst of crimes ; and not only unrepentant, but exulting in it, and only regretting that its consequence had not been so fatal as she had intended it to be. And *what* a criminal! An educated woman, so newly married that she might almost be still termed a bride, the wife of the squire of the parish (it did not strike him that this was a bathos) —had any man ever heard the like ! He could hardly believe her words, even yet, but he did believe them. Kind, right-thinking Mrs. Tyndall—his right hand in the parish, and always ready with her purse for his poor people, and with such good

views, too, upon church matters—had been in her heart—nay, was so still, since she had not repented of it — a murderess! True, she had done her best to repair her evil act, and thanks be to Heaven—for *her* sake, even more than for that of her victim, dear as she was to him—had succeeded. The good rector put that fact foremost in his mind, and kept it there. As to revealing what Helen had told him, to Alice, or any one else, he never dreamed of it. Her dark and terrible secret was as safe, so far as *he* was concerned, as though it had been intrusted to him under the seal of confession. But would she be mad enough to tell it to others? *That*—for he had no further apprehension upon Jenny's account; he felt that Helen had spent her wrath and hate—was now his only fear.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LETTER FROM AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

WHEN the news of Jenny's accident had been brought to Arthur Tyndall, he had been sitting with Allardyce in the smoking-room, into which the latter gentleman had lounged unasked: he did not often inflict his company upon his host, and Arthur had not the least expected the intrusion, which had happened at a most inopportune moment—just as he held the great lid of the old cabinet in his hand (one-half of which was the bookcase of which we have already spoken), and was meditating which

of the little drawers contained in it he should choose for a hiding-place for Jenny's packet. He would not trust it in his dressing-room, where his wife would have an excuse for coming; for, though there was nothing that he need be ashamed of in his own old love-letters, they would, of course, annoy her, should she chance to come across them; and he positively possessed no private receptacle of any sort in which he could place it.

Nothing was locked belonging to Arthur except the cellar-door, and the key even of that was confided to the butler. Whatever his faults, secretiveness or want of confidence could certainly not be laid to his charge. We have seen how the secret of his affection for Jenny (even when he was resolute not to encourage it) weighed upon his mind, and now that he had something material which it was necessary for him to conceal, his perplexity was ludicrous to witness. Where the deuce *was* he to put it? Should he burn the letters, and keep

the trinket? No; for if Helen should discover the latter without the letters to explain its existence, it being plainly a love-gift, matters would be even worse: she might imagine, in her jealous frenzy, that he had recently purchased the thing to give away. After all, this old cabinet—the lid of which let down and formed a desk, on which he had often written his holiday task in the vacations of his school-days—was as good a hiding-place as any other not under lock and key; indeed, in one of Edgar Poe's stories he had read that a place that was not locked was even safer for such a purpose, as not being open to suspicion; and there was no possible chance of any one's finding the thing by accident in one of those old drawers or "pigeon-holes."

He actually had the packet in his hand, and was about to put it away, when "that fellow Allardyce" came in, and had had but just time to thrust it in his pocket, and slam down the lid with a bang, and "look as

if he was doing nothing particular." He knew he had not quite succeeded in that last operation, but what did it matter? Old love-letters and a keepsake were not much in Lardy's way. Still, the circumstance annoyed him, and made the company of his guest more irksome even than usual. He felt inclined to make himself disagreeable (which was very rare with him), and did so—which was rarer. But Lardy's temper, if for this occasion only, was imperturbable, and not to be ruffled. Even when Arthur asked him whether anything had been heard of "that scoundrel Jones, whom you used to call 'Pretty Poll,'" he refused to take offence.

"I know nothing about the little blackguard," he replied; "and, in fact, I am the last man to know; he takes uncommon good care to keep out of *my* sight, and even hearing, you may be sure."

At which Arthur grunted: "Oh, indeed."

It was abundantly evident to Mr. Allar-

dyce that he had tired out his welcome at Swansdale Hall, so far as his host was concerned; but he did not mean to leave it just yet, or, when he did so, alone. If he could only get possession of that packet, Helen would be his; and he meant to have it. It was unfortunate that Arthur should have this disrelish for his society, as it was necessary to the object in view that he should just now favour him with it. He had watched his host go straight from the dining-room to the smoking-room, and it was very unlikely that he should have deposited the packet in the former place. There was scarcely time for him to have put it elsewhere before he sat down to lunch, for (as the other justly concluded) Tyndall would not have decided upon a hiding-place for so important a document —and Allardyce imagined it to be much more important than it was—in a hurry. At that bang of the lid of the cabinet he pricked his ears like a horse who hears the corn-bin open, and said to himself: "It is

there." And it was his plan to sit Arthur out, so that he might have the room alone, to convince himself of the fact. But, as though aware of his intention, his host sat on, pulling slowly at his cigar, while the other puffed his cigarette, and with his nimble fingers prepared its successor.

"Are you not due at the piano or the chess-table this afternoon?" inquired Arthur, expressing in his tone, by design, no little contempt for both those refined amusements.

"No; I am off duty for to-day," returned the other, gaily. "Are you not going to have another turn at the birds?"

"How the deuce could I?" replied Arthur, peevishly. "One couldn't see them in such a fog as this if they perched on the barrel of the gun."

"True, it *is* foggy," said Allardyce, with a glance at the window. And then the conversation would languish, only to be revived again by some brusque remark of Arthur's, which the other would take in

more provokingly good part than ever. It was in one of these pauses that the footman, in answer to a summons for more logs for the wood-fire, made bold, with a smiling face (for catastrophes are pleasant excitements to the country domestic), to acquaint his master that something had gone wrong down at the lock.

"Gone wrong? What do you mean? Are the gates burst?"

"No, sir; but they *do* say, as Miss Alice have fallen in——"

"Fallen into the lock? Great Heaven!"

Arthur was up, and had reached the door before the domestic could explain: "I don't think she's drowned, sir!" And without even waiting to put on his greatcoat, snatched his hat from its peg in the hall, and rushed off to Jacob's cottage, where we found him. On his way thither, he would gladly have compounded for any annoyance or mischance, if only Jenny should be safe; but on his return, though he left her convalescent, he was filled with irritation

and displeasure; Helen's conduct towards him had been not only cold but aggressive, and that, too, when he had done his very best to conciliate her, and had really felt towards her more warmly than he had ever done. He fully acknowledged the generosity with which she had acted with respect to Jenny, "though, after all, one surely would not—simply because one was absurdly jealous of her—let a fellow-creature drown if one could help it;" but her subsequent behaviour had chilled him to the core. Her icy face seemed to gaze on him through the mist, her bitter laugh still sounded in his ears. He had not, of course, the least suspicion of what had actually occurred. In the agitation of his thoughts, he did not even inquire of himself how Helen had come to be at the lock at all, and in the company of a woman whom he knew she detested; but, even believing what he did, his wife stood less high in his affections than she had done before. If she *had* saved Jenny, it was with

no willing hand, as she had taken pains to show him; while, with that good deed to her credit, it was only too probable that she would hold herself higher than ever, would be more defiant and exacting—and in a word intolerable. She had already publicly refused to come home with him. Well, if a *tête-à-tête* was so distasteful to her, it was at least equally so to him. She had the advantage over him in being able to put up with this continuous estrangement; but for his part he could not stand it much longer. She should keep her money, and he would leave her, and make his own way in the world, as he had intended to do while he was yet a free man. A free man! Yes. What an idiot he had been to sell himself into slavery!

Thus Arthur Tyndall pondered, on his way home, and afterwards up in the smoking-room, alone, for hours, sitting moodily over the fire, and ever and anon striking the burning logs with his foot. He had locked the door, to prevent further

intrusion, and when a knock was presently heard at it, inquired angrily—Who it was, and what was the matter?

"It is me, sir," returned the voice of Mrs. Glyn, the housekeeper. "I want to have a word with you, if you please."

He rose in some astonishment, for meek Mrs. Glyn had never made such a request before in her life, and let her in. The old lady wore two withered apples of a wholesome red in place of cheeks, and was consequently incapable of changing colour, but she had an anxious worried look, and it was in embarrassed tones that she addressed her master.

"O please, sir, if you would just step into missus' room and see her for a moment."

"Did she send you to ask me?" inquired Arthur coldly.

"No, sir; I came upon my own responsibility; but, the fact is, I don't think she is well."

"Not well? Why, I saw her only a few hours ago at the lock cottage."

"Ah, that was *it*, sir. I am afraid that what she did there—the pulling that girl out of the river" [Jenny was no great favourite of the housekeeper's; the common report of her having at one time aspired to be mistress of Swansdale Hall, offended her sense of the fitness of things] "was too much for her; or perhaps the fog has settled on her poor lungs; but she's downright ill, and my belief is she'll be worse."

"Send for the doctor instantly."

"I took the liberty of so doing, sir, though unknown to Mrs. Tyndall."

"Quite right. I'll go and see her at once."

The intelligence that his wife was ill, disarmed Arthur on the instant of all his indignation; his moods were hasty and violent, but he had a very tender heart. "What is this I hear, Helen?" said he kindly, as he entered her boudoir. She was crouching over the fire, and shivering with cold, though there was a burning spot on each of her cheeks. He had been often

among sickness in his travels, when there was no doctor to help, and knew the signs of ordinary ailments well enough.

She did not answer, but suffered him to take her hand, which was dry and hot, and feel her pulse.

"You are feverish, my dear Helen."

"Am I?" returned she carelessly. "What does it matter?"

"It matters a great deal to *me*, your husband," said Arthur with tender gravity; he was too alarmed about her to be annoyed.

Helen essayed to laugh her usual contemptuous laugh, but it died in her throat.

"You must go to bed at once, Helen. I, or at least Mrs. Glyn has sent for the doctor" [something forbade him to take any credit to himself on her account, where it was not his due]: "I am afraid you are going to have an attack of some kind."

"Indeed. Well, I will go to bed; it is just dinner-time; you will excuse me to

Mr. Allardyce.—O dear, how the room goes round!"

"You are giddy, my darling. Lean on me."

"No; thank you." (She tried to draw herself up with dignity.) "I feel better already. Send Esther, or Mrs. Glyn, please."

"You had rather have *them* about you, than me!" said Arthur with a reproachful sigh. "Well, I will send them. You will give me one kiss, Helen, before I go?"

She hesitated a moment; the red spots seemed to glow in her cheeks like burning coals. "No," said she curtly; "else, if the fever be contagious, I might give it to you."

He knew it was but an excuse to avoid kissing him, but it was something that she had troubled herself to invent an excuse; she might have denied him point-blank. While he still lingered in the room, the doctor came. At the first glance at his

new patient, he put on a grave face enough, and murmured: "Ah, I feared this."

"Well, what is it, doctor?" asked Helen wearily, when he had asked his questions.

"Well, it's what comes of going out in fogs, when we are not strong, and saving other people who have fallen into lashers. You've got a feverish cold on you; you must go to bed."

Then afterwards, in that conference outside the sick-room which takes place in such cases with a husband: "I don't like your wife's looks, Mr. Tyndall. I shall have more trouble with her, I foresee, than with my other patient yonder." And he pointed towards the lock.

The comparison was not agreeable to Arthur; he had (as he often observed to himself) no cause for self-reproach; but now that his wife was threatened with severe illness, this allusion to Jenny was somehow inopportune and unwelcome. Supposing Helen was to be very ill, dangerously ill — how sorry he would be.

Nay, if she were *to die?* That thought—though but half-an-hour ago he had been eager for something that should separate them, and the more completely the better—sent a shudder through his frame. He had half a mind to burn those records of affection for another which he had about him at that moment—to sacrifice them, as it were, on the altar of wedded love—so tender did he feel towards Helen, so solicitous to do away with the least ground of offence in her eyes. And yet, why should he? Would not such a proceeding be a tacit confession that there was still some feeling in his heart towards Jenny of which he was ashamed? No; he would put them away in the old cabinet, as he had originally intended.

This idea occurred to him in the smoking-room, to which he had again retired, and he put it into effect at once. He went to the bookcase, raised the lid, and, as before, was meditating into which drawer he should deposit the packet, when his eye lit

upon an open letter, lying on the flat part of the desk, and, of course, within it. It began, *My dear A.*, and was therefore apparently intended for himself. At first, his thoughts being so taken up with Helen, he concluded that his wife herself had placed it there; he had heard of some married couples who, not being upon speaking terms, had therefore written to one another, and perhaps Helen might have adopted that unpleasant means of giving him a piece of her mind, and perhaps proposing the very separation which he had had in his own thoughts; but the next moment he reflected that the letter had certainly not been there when he had been to the desk before; and whoever had opened it since, it could not have been Helen. Moreover, it was not in her hand-writing, which was eminently ladylike—all the letters very much alike, and slanting like a shower of rain; whereas this was a man's hand. It ran thus:

"My dear A.,

"It seems to me that you are taking up your residence at Swansdale; and though I *know* the attraction that keeps you there, I confess I do not understand it. It is one of the (few) misfortunes of being born a swell that their loves are always dangerous. Like the man who liked ham, and regretted he was not a Jew, in order that he might sin in eating it, the piquancy of peril seems requisite to engage your affections. In this particular case, however, you have revenge to gratify, and I need not say how heartily on this account *I* wish you *bonne fortune.* Never, never shall I forget that hour of disgorgement at Swansdale. Upon the whole, counting the dinners we gave him before play in London, I positively believe that I am *out of pocket* by the man who, at one time, bade fair to be a small fortune to us. I say *I*, because it is I who have suffered both in purse and reputation, while you have got off scot-free. I don't complain of that, my dear Lardy——"

As Arthur read that word, the truth for the first time broke in upon him. This letter was from Paul Jones to Allardyce, and the allusions of gallantry it contained could point to but one object—Helen. It was fortunate perhaps for all concerned that at that moment she was on a bed of sickness; for even with those hateful words respecting her before his eyes, he could not think evil of her *now*. Indeed, what reason culled from one scoundrel's letter to another, *had* he for thinking evil of her? The intentions of Allardyce, indeed, were made evident enough, but where was the proof that Helen knew of them? Arthur passed his hand across his forehead once or twice, then sat down to finish the letter.

"I don't complain of that, but my great revenge, as Mr. W. Shakespeare observes, has naturally a larger stomach than yours. From your last account, the affair appears to be progressing well. You shew your usual sagacity in the remark that your best

hope lies in your catching him tripping—or appearing to catch him, all's one for that—with J. W. That would drive your game into the net. Your observation that your charmer is a perfect demon for jealousy, is only what I expected. She always was a demon for most things, and treated me very bad. I have made the inquiries you requested, and find that H. S.'s fortune was settled unreservedly on herself and children; those unpleasant 'post-nuptial' articles have fortunately not supervened, but I warn you that in the case contemplated you will be by no means sure of the money. I have taken advice (and not gratis neither, but no matter) upon that point, and it seems 'the Court' (of Chancery, I suppose) has power to deal with the property of runaway wives in the interests of morality. A most abominable idea, is it not? Still, it is more than possible that A. T.'s infernal pride would incline him to waive that. I can fancy nothing pleasanter than to beggar him in this way, and then to offer him fifty

pounds a year out of his wife's money. I can't write of him, I can't think of him, without a thrill of hate; and yet there is one man in the world we have cause to hate more. When you have played out this little game, I trust you will give me your undivided aid in paying off all scores with 'honest Jack.' Gr-gr-gr-gr-gr——I growl like a dog to fly at his throat.—Yours, ever, "P. J."

CHAPTER XIV.

UNRECONCILED.

THE first impulse of Arthur Tyndall upon reading Paul Jones' infamous epistle was straightway to seek out his treacherous guest and wring his neck. So far as Allardyce was concerned, he would not have had the slightest scruple in so doing, and in all probability to attempt would have been to accomplish it; for naturally a more powerful man than his enemy, Tyndall's limbs and muscles were more exercised, and he was filled with the strength of hate. The idea of "calling him out," which would

have been the first to suggest itself to Uncle Magus, if afterwards to be set aside by the reflection that this fellow was proved by the letter itself to be the confederate of a blackleg, never entered into his mind. The instincts of the mere man within him were too strong for that. With those among whom his lot had been cast in foreign climes, it had been common enough to right one's self by the strong hand; and that experience had not been without its effect upon him. He had at bottom a contempt for the niceties of civilisation, and his passions, when once aroused, were fierce and headstrong. What saved him now from the commission of some act of violence, the consequences of which might have been fatal not only to its object but to himself, was his tenderness for Helen. If he should kill this man, what shame would be laid to *her* charge! He had not a doubt that she was free from all taint, nay, from the very thought of wrong. Notwithstanding his familiarity with the coarser

side of human life, he had a faith in the purity of women such as is possessed by few so-called men of the world; and his trust in his wife was absolute. If she had really given this scoundrel ground to hope for success, it must have been through her simplicity. And was it for him, her husband, to afford other ground for suspicion of her by gratifying his impulse for revenge? Doubtless, the reflection that she was ill, made his thoughts of her even more kindly and charitable than they would otherwise have been: if he felt a spark of anger on account of her imprudence, pity blew it out; while consideration for her prevented the gratification of his fury against Allardyce. It did not mitigate the rage within him, however: on the contrary, the necessity for moderation condensed it; he felt dangerous even to himself; and if ill fate had at that moment brought Wynn Allardyce within his sight, it is more than probable he would have lost all self-command. As it was, he pulled out his watch, and seating

himself at the old desk dashed off these words :

"I have read the inclosed letter. It is now six o'clock; if within one hour you have not left this house, or if I set eyes upon you in the meantime, as sure as my hand writes this, I will shoot you like a dog." Then placing Paul Jones' note with this in an envelope, he sealed it up and rang the bell. "Take this to Mr. Allardyce," said he to the servant, "and immediately."

"He is dressing for dinner, sir."

"No matter; put it into his own hand at once. And—— Stay; bring back his answer to me in my dressing-room."

Arthur went in thither, and opened a drawer in which he had always kept a pistol loaded since his marriage, at his wife's request. She had been accustomed to live in town, and was nervous in the country about thieves. If Allardyce should refuse to go, or venture to come into his presence, his blood be on his own head. He would keep his word.

He could hear the housekeeper talking softly to Helen's maid in the next room, where Helen herself was lying; their voices reminded him of an illness he had once had at school, the only severe one he had ever had, and when everybody about him had talked in a similar key—the tone of the sick-room when there is Danger. How frightful it would be to rouse the quiet of the house by a pistol-shot, and how it would terrify Helen! His wrath did not abate in the slightest degree, but he regretted having written so imperative a letter; he might at least have given this scoundrel longer rope—a little more time to get away. Nevertheless, so help him Heaven! he would keep his word. He stood by the open drawer looking at the pistol for what seemed the full hour, but which in reality was but a minute or two. Then steps came along the passage, and there was a knock at his door.

"Who is that?" asked he. Suppose it should have been Allardyce himself come

to offer some sort of explanation or denial! The perspiration stood upon his forehead.

"It's me, sir." Thank Heaven! it was the servant's voice.

He opened the door a little way. "Well, what is the message?"

"There is none, sir. At least Mr. Allardyce only said 'Indeed,' and 'Very good.'"

"Are you sure that was all?"

"Yes, sir; that was all he said to me. But his man was in the room, and I heard Mr. Allardyce give orders that his things should be packed at once, because Mrs. Tyndall was taken alarmingly ill, and that, on the whole, he thought it better to leave the house, lest he might be in the way."

"That is what I expected. Tell John to have the carriage round in half-an-hour to take Mr. Allardyce to the railway station. And don't let the gong be beaten for dinner nor any unnecessary noise made; indeed, there will be no dinner; I shall take a chop in the smoking-room instead,

when I have a mind for it. In the meantime I shall be with your mistress, who is not to be disturbed on any account."

"You would like to know when Mr. Allardyce goes, sir?"

"No; that will not be necessary; I have wished him 'good-bye' already."

It was with an immense sense of relief that Arthur shut the door, and closed the drawer and locked it. Then he passed softly into his wife's room, as into a sanctuary, and found her sleeping.

"That is a good sign," whispered he to the housekeeper, "surely?"

"Well, no, sir," returned the old lady sadly, "not sleep like that isn't. See how flushed her poor cheeks are, and how unlike one in health she breathes! You must be very quiet, please, sir, if you stop here."

Perhaps some reminiscence of the heyday of her master's youth, during which his high spirits had made him somewhat noisy, had crossed the housekeeper's mind, for

Arthur was quiet enough. He sat down beside the fire and listened to his wife's quick breathing, and also for the sounds of his guest's departure, which in due time he heard : the heavy but careful footsteps of those who carried the luggage downstairs ; the craunch of the carriage-wheels on the gravel as it drew up to the hall door ; a voice or two, and presently the vehicle's departure. It was welcome to his ears, of course ; and yet he found himself wondering whether the tread of those who carried a coffin would have the same muffled sound ; and if a hearse should be at the door, would it proclaim itself for what it was, or not ? Would the horses champ their bits, as his own did, and——

"Arthur ?" The voice came from the bed.

"Yes, dearest."

"I should like mamma to be sent for."

There was nothing unnatural in the expression of such a wish, under the circumstances ; and yet it made him shudder. It

seemed to corroborate the dread presentiment of death that had taken possession of him. And yet, like many another feeling of its sort, nothing was fated to come of it, at all events for that time. Helen got much worse, it is true ; had what the doctor called "a bad bout of it ;" lay for many a week in piteous case—for some days even between life and death—but in the end she recovered. It was afterwards said, indeed, that she never became herself again ; that the fever weakened vital powers that were weak before ; but that was after another event had occurred, to be mentioned in its proper place. What altered Helen for the worse, to common eyes, when she became convalescent, was her sense of the new relations in which she stood—she knew not to whom, with two exceptions, but perhaps to all the world. Jenny herself knew, and Mr. Glyddon knew of the crime she had attempted to commit, and had doubtless discussed it together ; the former it was more than probable had also confided it to

others. Arthur, however, knew nothing of it as yet. It was impossible, if he had known, that he could have manifested the tender assiduity that he had shown throughout her illness: to part of this she had been herself a witness when she had got well enough to take notice of anything; and her own mother gave evidence of the rest.

"He has showed the best of 'arts, my dear, 'as your good 'usband," asserted the old lady in a burst of enthusiasm which carried away all her aspirates. "He slept in a bed a foot and a half too short for him for weeks, without complaint, until Mrs. Glyn went in on a sudden one morning and found his feet out; all that he might be in the next room to you, and 'as never failed to make up your fire, though it were 'alf-a-dozen times in the night, with his own 'and."

Mrs. Somers was not a mother-in-law of the ordinary type, for she had "taken to" Arthur, as she expressed it, from the first, and would have defended him even from

the aspersions of her own Helen, if she had heard them. But although she saw that there was some coldness between the young couple, she was never admitted into her daughter's confidence sufficiently to learn what she always desired to acquire, "the rights and wrongs" of the matter.

Helen was not unmoved by her mother's account of Arthur's devotion to her during her illness, corroborated, as it was, by other witnesses—but her mind was by no means ripe for reconciliation. In the first place, she reflected, that even if his attentions to her were not owing in some measure to gratitude for the supposed part she had played in saving Jenny, they would certainly not have been paid had he known what her conduct towards that young woman had really been. She rather resented them, therefore (so soon as she was sufficiently recovered to do so), than otherwise—not so much from a sense of unworthiness, as in order that when he did come to know the truth, he might not say

that she had obtained them under false pretences. Any praise of her heroic behaviour on the occasion in question was most distasteful to her, and not the least was the talk in which everybody indulged concerning her recent illness having been caused by her exertions at the lasher; for she very well knew that they were principally due to her having sat at the open window in a fit of passion, inviting consumption. Again, though she felt not nearly so remorseful as she should have done with respect to her relations with Mr. Allardyce, she knew that she had behaved imprudently with him, and imagined that her husband was aware of it, from his complete reticence respecting that gentleman. Uncle Magus had perhaps communicated his suspicions to Arthur. These things all worked together for ill with Helen, and prevented her from falling into that meek and grateful state (known to the vulgar as "lamby") incidental to persons slowly recovering from illness, and of which so much might have

been hoped. As Helen got better too, not only did Arthur's solicitude relax, but, as it seemed to her, his tenderness also, though that was in reality owing to the cold reception she gave it. He was deeply thankful for her recovery, and anxious that a better understanding should exist between them; but her secret, which might be no secret to him any day, made her hard and unyielding.

She had not the courage, or, perhaps, she had too much pride, to confess it to him with her own lips. They were naturally thrown more together than they had been before her illness, and yet their talk was never confidential. She made conversation to him as to an ordinary acquaintance, in order to prevent its being so. On one occasion, however, when they were sitting in Helen's boudoir together (she was not yet strong enough to go down-stairs), some expression of pleasure he let fall concerning her returning health melted the ice about her heart.

"I suppose I have been very ill, Arthur?"

"Very ill, my darling — so ill that I almost feared that you would be taken from me."

"*Et après?*" said she, with involuntary bitterness.

"My dear?" replied he simply, not understanding her French, nor anybody's French.

His simplicity touched her, and her own heart smote her too.

"Was it infectious?" said she. "Were people afraid of catching it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, dear." That touched her also; and it was true. He had not given a thought to the matter. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I thought Mr. Allardyce had run away for fear of it."

Arthur's brow darkened; he had wished to forget all about that scoundrel, and especially disliked to be reminded of him by Helen.

"No. He went for his own pleasure; or, rather, it became necessary that he should go."

"Indeed!" She felt hot and uncomfortable, but spoke as carelessly as she could. "How was that?"

"Well, I did not intend to tell you of it at present, but you must never mention that man's name again. He is an unutterable scoundrel. I"—he hesitated a moment—the blood rushed to her brain with a noise like the lasher itself—"I found out by sure proof that he was, after all, what Jack (and, indeed, everybody else but ourselves) believed him to be, a confederate of that scoundrel, Paul Jones. If, thanks to you, I had not forsworn gambling, he would have stripped me of my last shilling."

He meant nothing but kindness to Helen by that last sentence, as it was easy to perceive. But, unhappily, it put her in mind of the circumstances under which he had made that promise to her to play no more;

of the mental reservation of which she was sure he had been conscious when he said that it was nothing but his debts that had suggested his giving her up. Her *bête noire*, Jenny, whose dark hue had been fading a little, at once presented itself to her mind, as black and hateful as ever. Instead of alluding to it, however, her displeasure expressed itself, characteristically enough, in defending her sprig of the herb valerian.

"But this is very shocking, Arthur; are you sure you are making no mistake? We have seen a great deal of Mr. Allardyce lately, and—you used to be such a stanch defender of his——"

"I am *quite* sure," interrupted Arthur, decisively; "and I wish we had not seen so much of him."

There was more significance in his tone than he had, perhaps, intended. She felt it in every fibre of her frame; yet she was not afraid. If she had been imprudent with Mr. Allardyce, what was that compared

with her husband's conduct with respect to Jenny? What right had *he*, merely upon Uncle Magus' notion, to use such a tone towards her as that?

"How did you come to find it out?" asked she, with obstinate pertinacity; for she knew, whatever might be the reason, that he wished to let the subject drop.

"By a letter from Paul Jones to the man himself."

"How came you to get hold of a letter intended for Mr. Allardyce?"

Here, in her turn, she inadvertently touched a very tender place.

Arthur had put Allardyce from his mind as much as possible throughout his wife's illness, for the thought of him, in spite of himself, seemed to harden his heart against her. But there was one question that would often intrude itself upon him, and was very importunate for a reply—Why had Allardyce been prying into his old desk, and for what? That he had done so was plain enough, and in that act had

dropped the letter from Paul Jones, probably out of his breast-pocket. From the position in which Arthur had been found by Allardyce, when he had suddenly entered the smoking-room, it was likely enough that the latter should have suspected him of having hidden something of importance in that receptacle. But what object could he have had in looking for it? He was a rogue in one sense, it was true, but not a common thief. A certain passage in Jones' letter had haunted Arthur with respect to this circumstance.

"You show your usual sagacity in the remark that your best hope lies in your catching him tripping—or appearing to catch him, all's one for that—with J. W. That would drive your game into the net."

Was it possible that Allardyce had become aware of the existence of the packet that Jenny had given to him, and was looking for *that?* At Helen's inquiry, "How came you to get hold of a letter addressed to Mr. Allardyce?" this idea occurred to

his mind with unusual force; it shot into it like an arrow—barbed.

"I found it in my old school-desk; he had dropped it out of his breast-pocket, as I suppose, while he was prying after something or other, the mean scoundrel! But, perhaps, you will defend him for *that!*"

"Why should you say that, Arthur?"

"Well, at all events, you show no indignation at his baseness," continued he, with irritation. "One would think that prying into another man's desk was an action to excite anybody's abhorrence. For my part, I hate underhand, secretive ways of all kinds——"

"Do you never use them yourself, Arthur?" interrupted she.

At this astounding question, delivered in a cold and quiet tone, Arthur looked up angrily from the fire, on which his eyes had been fixed throughout the latter part of their dialogue. But Helen met his gaze quite firmly. "What do you mean, Helen? I don't understand you."

"Oh, yes, you do," she struck in, impetuously; "your anger shows me that, and yet you have cause for shame much more than anger. 'No underhand, secretive ways,' do you say? *You!* who make assignations with another woman, within half a mile of your own door, and receive letters from her!"

Wild with jealousy and the sense of wrong as Helen was, and eager, since the opportunity had offered itself, to tax him with his perfidy to the uttermost, there was an expression in Arthur's eyes before which she quailed. It was with a sensible moderation in her tone that she added—"It is no use to deny it, Arthur, for I saw you with my own eyes."

"And Allardyce was with you, was he not?" said Arthur, in a tone the quiet coldness of which contrasted strangely with the passion in his face; she would have much preferred to have heard him storm and swear.

"Mr. Allardyce and I chanced to be

walking on the upper path above the chalk-pit," answered she.

"And you *chanced* to express a wish to have that packet—you set him on to get it! *You!* under your own roof, induced this villain, by promise of what bribe is best known to yourself, to pry and spy upon your own husband!"

He had risen from his chair, and stepped aside, as though to remove himself from her proximity; his face was full of such disgust and loathing as could scarcely have been excited by the spectacle of some creeping reptile.

"No, no, Arthur!" cried she, with a sudden access of her old devotion, and with eager clutch at the love that seemed departing from her for ever. "On my soul, it was not so! I knew nothing of his attempt to get possession of the packet; though perhaps I did say I should like to have it. Was it not natural that I should do so?"

"Natural? Perhaps to *you!*" scoffed Arthur.

"To me, or to any wife. When my own eyes beheld you keep an appointment with that infamous girl——"

"Two lies," interrupted Arthur; "the girl is innocent, pure as yourself—perhaps purer! and our meeting was accidental."

"And the letter that she gave you—a whole packet, as it looked to me—was that accidental? was that innocent?"

"It was."

"Then show me its contents.—Ah! you dare not. I do not wonder at that."

"There is nothing in that packet, Helen, I take Heaven to witness, that I have any need to be ashamed of, or you to reproach me with."

"Then show it me."

"No; I will not." He had opened the door, and stood with the handle of it in his hand, turning once more to look at her: the last look of tenderness—though it was firm too, that he was ever to cast; but she was overmastered by passion, and took no note of that. "You have attempted to gain

possession of it by such base means—by help of so infamous an ally," he said, "that I will never, never show it to you!"

"And I will never believe you!" answered she. "I will never believe that there is nothing to be ashamed of in it, until you do show it me."

Then the door closed, and he was gone. If the opportunity had really offered itself to them, at the beginning of their talk, for living a new life, for being for the future man and wife, as man and wife should be, for letting bygones be bygones, it was past now, and (they both felt it) was never to occur again.

CHAPTER XV.

BRIGNON.

IF Alice Renn had been the sort of girl Helen took her for, or endeavoured to convince herself she was, it is probable that she would now have had good cause for jealousy. The two things that conduce to a man's unfaithfulness, in about equal proportions, are dislike of his wife, and liking for another woman; and Arthur, who had been hitherto influenced by the latter feeling only, was now urged by both. It is true he did not dislike Helen to the extent of aversion, and far less did he wish her

harm. But his love for her, now pity had ceased, was gone, and, what is worse in such cases, much of his respect had gone with it. He had no suspicion that she had permitted Allardyce to speak to her such words as he *had* spoken, but his confidence in her was shaken to its foundation. If he had ever given her his real affections, they returned to him now, perhaps to be bestowed elsewhere, if there had been a chance of their acceptance. But he well knew there was none. Jenny never spoke with him, never looked at him again, after that fatal meeting in the chalk-pit. But he did not burn his old love-letters, as he had once intended to do, and he hung the love-gift that she had been wont to wear about his own neck, and next his heart. If Helen could have looked into his thoughts, she would have had good cause to call him faithless.

The unhappy couple were no longer on good terms enough even to quarrel. When by themselves, they rarely spoke to one another, and if they did, only on the most

ordinary topics; and to be alone together was hateful to both of them. They occupied separate apartments; and at dinner, Mr. Glyddon, the doctor, or some other neighbour, was generally invited, because, in the teeth of the proverb, three were company, and two were none. For a time, Mrs. Somers stayed with them, but the good old lady was too scandalised by what she witnessed to remain a silent spectator of such "goings on." It was Helen whom she chiefly blamed for it all. "My dear, a man is what his wife makes him," was the opinion she had the temerity to express.

"That is rubbish," was the irreverent reply. "It is very easy for Arthur to be civil to *you*, in order to secure your good word. But how does he treat *me*?"

"Well, he's civil enough, at all events;" and, indeed, Arthur's manner towards his wife had that excessive polish, commonly termed "the pink of politeness," which, to the observer of human nature, is anything but a genuine sign of regard. "And as for

affection, my dear, you must remember that that's a flower as is nipped in the bud by frost; and I've seen you catch him up, and cut him short, in a way as *I* never ventured to use to your poor father, if he was ever so aggravating."

But neither the metaphor nor the experience of Mrs. Somers availed with Helen, to whom her mother's remonstrances at last became so intolerable, that she gave the old lady plainly to understand that she was overstaying her welcome at Swansdale Hall; and she departed. Curiously enough, as she had taken her son-in-law's part—not from a prejudice in his favour, of course, but because she really thought him hardly used, and also, perhaps, because that course seemed to her more conducive to mutual reconciliation—so did the sympathies of Uncle Magus enlist themselves on Helen's side rather than on that of his own flesh and blood. The chivalry of his nature had doubtless something to do with this. The sight of the

unhappiness of a woman was always a passport to his heart; but he also liked Helen for her own sake. He gave her credit for having herself dismissed Allardyce—for Arthur kept strict silence upon the reasons of that gentleman's sudden departure—and was inclined to believe that this was the result of his own paternal advice. Many a well-meant hint did he let fall, when his nephew and he were smoking their cigars, concerning domestic disagreements and their cure, and many a kindly endeavour did he make, when all three were together, to bring about a more comfortable state of things. Nay, so seriously did he take the matter to heart, that notwithstanding his habits of reticence, and jealous care for the honour of the family, he secretly wrote to Mrs. Ralph Tyndall—a mere connection by marriage—to entreat her aid and that of her daughter Blanche towards a reconciliation. They were both most eager to offer their good services; but Mrs. Ralph, who knew human nature far better than did

Uncle Magus, pointed out how dangerous would be any unsought interference on her part, and how imprudent it would be to invite herself to Swansdale on a venture in which Helen's own mother herself had failed. She sent, indeed, a most pressing invitation to Arthur and his wife to come and stay with them in town, but the offer was declined.

Helen, whose health was by no means re-established, had been ordered by the doctors to the south of France. She was really very far from well, and the opinion of the London physician, that she should try the air of Brignon, had been a *bonâ fide* one ; but Arthur smiled cynically when he heard it, and imagined that the idea had been suggested by Helen herself, in order to get away from Swansdale, and Jenny. He made no objection, however (if " Try Van Diemen's Land " had been the verdict, he would have only replied : " Very good, by all means," and would have tried it), and took her to Brignon. They travelled by

easy stages, and in the most comfortable manner; he had his man, and she her maid; the best private rooms in the hotels were secured beforehand; she had no necessity to express her wishes, for they were anticipated; and they did not exchange half-a-dozen words throughout the entire journey.

Brignon is on the sea-coast, and, if in England, would be considered the ugliest place within Her Majesty's dominions. Being in France, and difficult of access, it is spoken of by English people—even by those who have seen it—as picturesque. It has really fine sands and a noble sea-view; but the country around it is as flat as a pancake, and without a tree, with the exception of some mangy poplars—very like the trees in our cheap Noah's Arks—which fringe its sandy roads. It is not a cheap place, but it is a very nasty one, and the hotels are horrible. The spring was not far advanced when the Tyndalls arrived, and the fashionable visitors who resort to Brignon in the season were not due for months. In the

meantime it was occupied by the *bourgeoisie* of the neighbouring towns. To them, perhaps, it was cheap, and may *not* have seemed nasty. The air is splendid, health-giving, life-giving; and, in consequence of that attribute, one of the largest hospitals in France has been built at Brignon. A small portion of it only is used for the general purposes of a hospital; the rest is devoted to consumptive patients. These afflicted persons haunt the sands, like ghosts, for a few weeks; then gradually gain flesh and colour, and go away literally twice the men (or women) they were. The hospital is clean, and excellently conducted. The hotels conduct themselves — at least no landlord is ever found when a complaint has to be made—and very badly. The beds, indeed, are good, as all French beds are; but the rooms—even the best of them —are bare and wretched, and the domestic arrangements infamous. The principal dish at the principal *table-d'hôte* is (or was in the Tyndalls' time) liver and plums; but

what the food is, is of small consequence when the appetite is raging for anything. At Brignon one could eat liver and plums four times a day, if one could get them; but such luxuries are not always forthcoming.

The amusement of the place is Swinging. From morning to night the population take their pleasure in swings, erected—perhaps by the government; at all events nobody pays — on the sea-shore. This already healthy locality is held still healthier if it is pervaded in a state of nature. Scruples, however, having been expressed (probably by some English visitor) against this practice, a little clothing is worn. The gentlemen wear jerseys and drawers; the ladies affect some drapery; but nobody wears shoes or stockings. The sand of Brignon is almost as health-giving as its air. If Mrs. Somers had been with her belongings, she would have remarked that the hair of Brignon was sandy; for it is so—very. The breeze that is always blowing there

bears clouds of sand, but that is good (says the excellent head of the hospital staff) for the lungs and the eyes, and it certainly does them no harm. It was not under this gentleman's professional care that Mrs. Tyndall was placed, because her London physician had recommended another; but he had an equal confidence in the miraculous air. "Mrs. Tyndall was sure to get well at Brignon," he said; "everybody did. But in order to effect a rapid cure, she must move rapidly *through* the air. There was nothing like swinging."

It must be understood that the swings at Brignon are not merely composed of a seat and two ropes; but are regular boats, with two seats, such as in England are only seen at fairs. A Brignon market-woman will gravely put down her basket, invigorate herself with a swing or two, and then march on, pursuing her vocation till she comes to another erection of the same kind, when she will get in and swing again; the postman discontinues the delivery of

the letters, to enjoy the same enchanting exercise; the priest on his way to administer the viaticum is perhaps the only exception to the practice, and he recompenses himself for the self-denial by a double amount of enjoyment on his way back. For do not let it be supposed that the occupation is of a frivolous character; it is pursued, on the contrary, with the utmost gravity. Stout ladies, mothers of families, and even those expecting to be more so, step stolidly into these machines, and are swung by their husbands, who (in jerseys and drawers) stand over them, like a colossus, with a foot on each side of the boat, and pull seriously at the rope above them, as though they were tolling a knell. Everybody is grave and sober throughout the operation, and nobody is sick. Perhaps Helen mistrusted herself in the latter respect, or being unable to swing herself, gave up the idea, as she could scarcely ask her husband to help her. After months of isolation and reserve, she could hardly

break silence for the first time with, "Arthur, swing me." As a substitute, though by no means an efficient one for this healthful practice, the doctor recommended carriage-exercise.

So every day a sort of mail phaeton with two prancing steeds drew up at the door of the *Brignon Hotel*, and the Milor Anglais, who was so polite and deferential to his wife that he might almost have been a Frenchman, stepped in with Miladi, and drove her along the flat roads between the poplars at good speed. Neither of them were desirous to have a witness to their frigid behaviour to one another; though a listener he would not have been, for they did not speak. So they were unaccompanied by a groom. However strange that might appear, there was surely no danger in it, for though the steeds were the freshest and fleetest that could be procured, Milor, like most of his countrymen, was skilful to guide them. The astonishment of the Brignon public was conse-

quently great when, late one afternoon, the mail phaeton returned, but without its occupants. That there had been an accident was certain, for one panel of the carriage was stained with clay, and the horses were in a bath of sweat, and looked wild and frightened. The public consternation was excessive : men of action forgot to swing, and expressed by pantomime, to eager spectators, how the wheel must have run up a bank, and Milor Anglais been pitched out from his high seat in this direction, and my Miladi in that.

Everybody was shocked and desolated; nor were many hours suffered to elapse before men were despatched on the road the missing pair were known to have taken, to give aid, and more especially to make a due report of the affair to the authorities. The French (until late events revealed the imposture) have always been reckoned the readiest people in the world—which, indeed, they are with their tongues; but in the investigation of what we call "accidents

and offences," they certainly do not err on the side of precipitancy. It was late at night, fortunately a moonlit one, before they discovered on a sharp decline (the only one in that part of the country) about ten miles from Brignon, one in this direction, and one in that, precisely as the pantomimist had described them, the bodies of Arthur Tyndall and his wife. Dead bodies they both seemed, when they were first lifted up ; but this was not so. They were quite insensible, but they still breathed, and were at once conveyed to the accident wards of the Brignon hospital. The road was stony at the place where the catastrophe had occurred, and it was supposed that they had been pitched out on their heads, for they had each sustained a fracture of the skull. Miladi's injury was pronounced to be the most severe in this respect; but Milor, in addition to his head-wound, had broken bones and a snapped rib, which was thought to be pressing on his lungs. As it happened, both the acci-

dent wards were pretty full; but room was made for the new-comers; and they were tended with that care and tenderness which medical skill rarely fails to bestow, though its objects be ever so unknown and alien. The telegraph did not exist at Brignon, nor, to confess the truth, were the postal arrangements quite what they should have been, but within eight-and-forty hours from the time of the reception of the unhappy pair within the hospital, Mrs. Ralph Tyndall was sitting at breakfast turning over a foreign letter, the handwriting of the address of which puzzled her not a little.

"Who on earth can this be from, Blanche? —Oh, great Heaven!"

"What *is* the matter, mamma?"

Her mother did not answer, but turning very white, threw the note across to Blanche, and vehemently rang the bell. The letter was from Helen's maid, and ran as follows:

"My master and mistress have both met

with dreadful accidents, and are lying in Brignon Hospital; from what I gather—but I cannot rightly understand what the people say—there is little hope of either of them surviving. My dear mistress was far from well before, and that, they tell me, makes her case more dangerous. For God's sake, come, madam, at once."

"Charles," said Mrs. Ralph to the servant who answered her summons, "let some one be instantly despatched to Mr. Adair's chambers in the Temple, with the request that he should come here without a moment's delay; and send Maria to me at once.—Don't cry, my darling Blanche; that can do no good." The large tears were stealing down her own face, nevertheless.

"Oh mamma, if Arthur and Helen have not been reconciled," sobbed Blanche.

"That was my first thought, Blanche, also; but hush, hush!—Maria, pack up some clothes for us immediately; Miss

Blanche and I are going abroad." Then she took up a *Bradshaw*, and looked out for the tidal train. "Come, that will suit well, at all events, and leave time for the passport to be *viséd*," said she, "I only trust Mr. Adair will not fail us."

"I will answer for Jack—I mean Mr. Adair," broke in Blanche.

"Very good, my dear; but I want him to answer for himself in person," was Mrs. Ralph's quiet reply. "We too must go, of course, at all events; so, when you have finished your breakfast, you had better go to Maria."

"I could not swallow a mouthful, mamma —it would choke me;" and she withdrew accordingly at once, to see, as well as her tears would permit, about the packing. She had never thought to cry—except with pleasure—at the prospect of having Jack Adair for her travelling companion; and that he was to be so, she felt certain. Nor was her confidence misplaced.

"It is awkward, of course," was Mrs. Ralph's reflection, "and must needs throw them much together, which is the very thing I would have avoided. But Mr. Adair is Arthur's oldest and best friend; and in a strait like this, I know no other man, that I can apply to, half as unselfish, prompt, and useful. Poor dear Arthur—poor Helen! What an end to their short married life; and what a sad life it has been! The money was on the wrong side there too."

Mrs. Ralph Tyndall was a woman of the world, though not a worldly woman. She liked Adair exceedingly, but she would have liked him better, and certainly looked more favourably on him as a suitor for her daughter's hand, if his affairs had been more prosperous. Whatever were her personal wishes or apprehensions, however, they were never suffered to interfere with what she felt to be her duties to others; and soon after noon that day, Mrs.

Ralph Tyndall and her daughter were in the express to Folkstone, with Mr. John Adair, barrister-at-law, for their escort, bound for Brignon.

END OF VOL. II.

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